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#99

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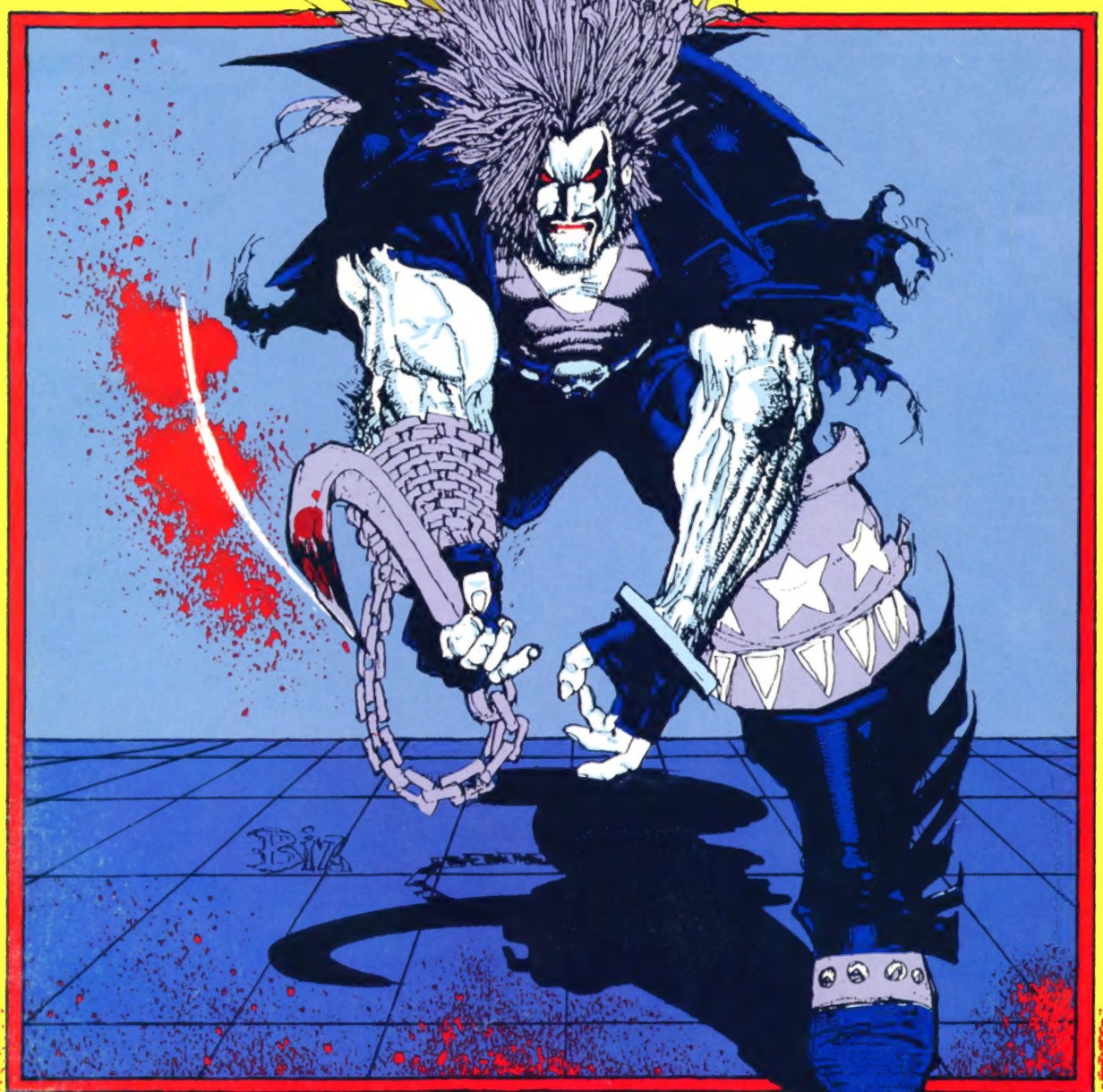

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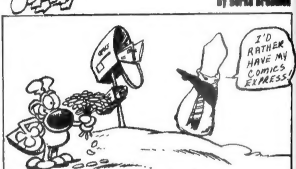

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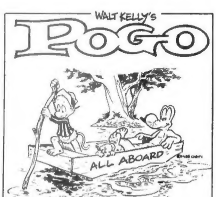

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UP FRONT

LOBO VS. LUNATIK

Long ago and far away, in another life, I collaborated with **Keith Giffen** on THE DEFENDERS for Marvel. It was stimulating scripting over Keith's challenging layouts, so when he asked if we could introduce a new villain he had ideas about — named Lunatik — I said OK. The first appearance of this yet-to-be character came on the final page of DEFENDERS #51, in the form of a shadowy figure wearing gloves, boots and carrying a staff.

The sub-plot got no further than a mere mention in passing in DEFENDERS #52, and the next thing I knew **Giffen** had a falling out with Marvel and migrated to DC — so abruptly that he turned in only about every *other* page of what ended up as part of #53 and a foreshortened #54.

Suddenly, it fell to me to create the character of Lunatik — including the visuals! His name suggested a wild man, a whacko, so I gave him the crazed dialect of a psycho who has heard one too many commercial jingles. As for appearance — I borrowed a bit from the Joker (white face, but frizzy purple hair instead of green) and a bit from **Alice Cooper** (the make-up), and threw in a ski/jumpsuit to go with the gloves, boots and staff.

Thus was born a character that I later learned became a big favorite of actor **David Carradine** and many another. Sort of an early prototype of today's Lobo.

Years later at DC, **Giffen** and writer **Roger Slifer** collaborated on THE OMEGA MEN (cover-featured on the very first issue of COMICS INTERVIEW, as fate would have it). Keith still wanted to do his wild-and-crazy character — only he'd lost the Lunatik name. Roger suggested calling him Lobo, instead. And perhaps not-altogether-coincidentally, he ended up looking more than a little like *my* visual design for Marvel's Lunatik.

What goes around, comes around. In another odd-but-fitting part of this "story behind the story," 'twas none other than **Roger Slifer** who was responsible for my becoming the regular writer of DEFENDERS in the first place — or I'd probably never have been pushed into more-or-less creating Lunatik when Keith flew the coop.

Sounds like one of those circular-logic comic-book plots! So pardon me if I think of Lobo as my "controversial campus crazy," gone cosmic, and watch in wonder to see what's next.

"Right now we're putting finishing touches on the

LOBO ON TV

"How about doing something on the LOBO TV project?" David Anthony Kraft said. Fine. Sure. Great. And far, far, far easier said than done. The assignment was, appropriately enough, madness.

Warner thinks Lorimar has the project. Lorimar thinks Warner has the project. And so, of course, Roger Corman has it. As the clock ticks toward deadline. Screenwriters Craig Van Sickle and Steven Long Mitchell are laboriously tracked down, and cheerfully agree to an interview. The appointed hour arrives, the call is made, and of course they aren't in. As the clock ticks past deadline. An hour later, they call — of course they were in all the time, waiting for your call, but somebody thought they weren't. How's that again? The phone connection is, of course, terrible. You redial three times, and of course it gets no better. Yeearrrgh!

There. I'm better now. The tape is rolling and, even though I can only hear every third word, the interview is being adequately recorded. And the LOBO TV project is, in fact, rolling along quite nicely, too. Roger Corman — the famed director of the Edgar Allen Poe film adaptations of the '60s and an enduring little oddity called THE LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS — is handling it in association with Warner, developing LOBO as a CBS project and possible mid-season replacement.

Indiana native Van Sickle, 30, and New Orleans-born Mitchell, 28, are already old hands at TV and features — MURDER SHE WROTE, THE LAW AND HARRY MCGRAW, SKI PATROL — with expertise in fantasy-oriented material — ALIEN NATION, THE FLASH (both times as writer/producers). They got their start doing standup and improvisational comedy, so they also lend that edge to the project.

All of which should be interesting to the readers, if I can get this damn thing typed and in to the post office in the few

CAN YA BELIEVE IT?
CAN YA BELIEVE SOMEONE WOULD PULL THIG KIND OF STUNT WITH ME--ASSASSIN TO ROYALTY AN SCOURGE OF THE COSMOS?

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shooting script. We've been working on it several months."

minutes before it closes. So here I sit, transcribing feverishly. Feeling a little lightheaded now. No breakfast, no lunch, no trips to the bathroom and, of course, it's my birthday. Happy birthday. Bah!

DAN HAGEN: *What stage is the LOBO project now?*

STEVEN LONG MITCHELL: Oh, we're not involved with that. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *Right.*

CRAIG VAN SICKLE: Right now, we're putting the finishing touches on what will be the shooting script. We've been working on it, I guess, for several months. The nice thing is that the powers that be have really left us alone . . . The scary part is we've figured out that there's a lot of Lobo in both of us.

STEVE: We couldn't figure out who Lobo was until we looked in the mirror one day.

CRAIG: And the problem with Lobo was that he's not a nice guy, and in translating him we had to come up with a way to redeem his character so he wasn't just a guy who killed everyone on this planet.

DAN: *I couldn't quite . . . what? Re-something? Repeal, repeat, revise his character?*

CRAIG: Well, we needed to give his character more of a heart. I know that's hard to say because Lobo is a guy who tries to rip your heart out. But we needed to find a way that we could have the audience sort of root for him without watering him down, because he's still got to be the character you sort of love to hate. We kind of tried to give him a back story which comes out in the show which is a little bit more why he became so angry. And we tried to pump the humor with the supporting characters . . . but we keep the spirit of him being . . .

DAN: *A wild and crazy guy, eh?*

CRAIG: Definitely wild and crazy. He still rides his motorcycle in space, and he is a sight to behold.

STEVE: Still kicks butt.

CRAIG: But we had to make him likable. We had to find something in him that even if you hated him, you loved to hate him.

DAN: *What, then, was the key to the character?*

STEVE: Again, it was finding that little bit of heart or something that the audience could root for, or at least understand why he was the way he was.

DAN: *And where did you find it?*

STEVE: Basically in his back story. In the comic book, you'll notice, he just wiped out everybody on this planet. And there's really never an explanation as to why . . . We came up with a reason for why he was an orphan and why he had been pretty much rejected as a child, which has forced him to go off and be this renegade. And during the pilot we find that all the terrible things that supposedly happened in his past which made everyone hate him were not his fault . . .

CRAIG: He was framed.

DAN: *A victim.*

STEVE: So he's still a despicable guy, but deep down he does have a heart. And of course, within the comic book you can see that with his relationship with the dolphins. He can associate with them. His problem is he can't associate with people. Sort of like Archie Bunker. I know this is a weird analogy, but Archie was a real gruff character but underneath it he still had a heart.

DAN: *Do you guys follow comics much?*

CRAIG: Somewhat. Neither one of us are fanatics, which in some ways I think maybe works to our advantage.

DAN: *In what ways?*

CRAIG: We've worked with a lot of comic-book people, and there is such a strict language and there is such a strict code that I think, by not having to adhere to that so strictly and not being so aware of it and locked into it, we were able to bring sort of a new flavor to what already existed in that comic. We brought more of the experience and knowledge we have in television to the project, which is really what Lobo needed. Going back to the whole issue of his character, you couldn't do the Lobo comic on TV without some major adjustments.

DAN: *Similarly for The Flash. What's*

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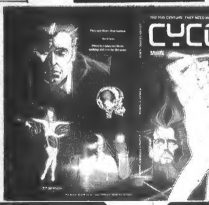

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"There was apprehension because it is so psychotic."

that translation process like? Are there basic principles involved, or . . .?

CRAIG: Not really basic principles, but I think what you need to do is look at a character through, if you will, your grandmother's eyes. We are appealing to a much wider audience than a limited audience that would find Lobo, in his sick, demented way, very attractive. If you showed that to your grandmother, she would go, "Ick." We needed to find a way that she could say, "Lobo's a nice boy."

DAN: *What about that trend in comics? It's come to disturb me over the last 10 years or so. There are a lot of psychotic superheroes running around now.*

STEVE: I think the pendulum has just swung completely the other way. The superheroes sort of became so homogenized that a lot of the comic-book people have tried to just go so dark in the other direction. And, like anything else, I'm sure it will swing back.

DAN: *I would hope so. They're no longer heroes anymore if they're schizophrenic killer psychotics.*

CRAIG: Right, creatures of the night who are doing it because their wives and mothers were raped and dismembered. It's not ARCHIE anymore.

DAN: *Far from it. I think it certainly would be a surprise for the general public, to see what some comic books have become.*

CRAIG: Right. Well, when we were given LOBO, the first time we'd seen it, there were certain things about it that were very funny and kind of refreshing. But on the other hand, as you know, in that first series he's bringing his school-teacher back, rips her legs off and ultimately kills her. And that's supposed to be funny!

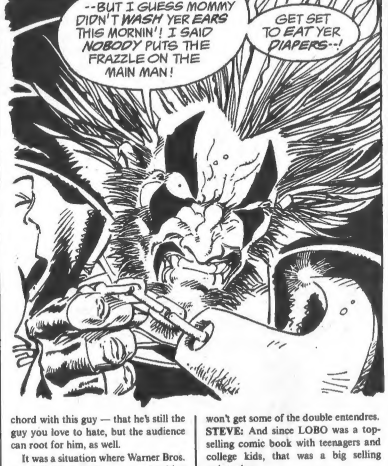
DAN: *It takes a certain kind of reader.*

CRAIG: Absolutely. One who has a straightjacket on. *(Laughter.)*

STEVE: And that's why they brought the project to us. We can type with our toes.

DAN: *Did you see the possibilities in it, or did you think, "Geez, this is going to be a headache?"*

STEVE: There was a lot of apprehension on the part of the people who brought the project to us — not in bringing it to us, but in thinking, "Could this thing even work?," because it is so — like you said — psychotic. I think we took it as a challenge. As we really got under the skin of it and made it more our own, that's really when it started to take off for us and we got excited about it. It was finding the Lobo character, that moment when we knew that we had hit the right



chord with this guy — that he's still the guy you love to hate, but the audience can root for him, as well.

It was a situation where Warner Bros. and CBS thought there was something interesting about that character and came to us. And frankly, for the first couple months of its development, we couldn't put it into words what the show was going to be. At CBS, they kind of looked at us like,"Well, I don't know what you're talking about, but go do it . . ."

CRAIG: I think they thought there was something there, but didn't think it was going to happen. And we were very, very pleasantly surprised when we brought back something that actually could work.

DAN: *Is CBS looking for a particular audience with this, do you think? The youth audience?*

CRAIG: The psychotic straightjacket audience. *(Laughter.)* No, they're looking at it as an 8 o'clock show, so they want it to be for a young audience. They'd like, obviously, a broad audience appeal, but we're looking at it as something a kid can like but there are certain adult aspects and in-jokes. We figure you can watch with your kids, your kids won't get some of the double entendres.

STEVE: And since LOBO was a top-selling comic book with teenagers and college kids, that was a big selling point, also.

DAN: *How about the fate of THE FLASH? Does that impact on it at all?*

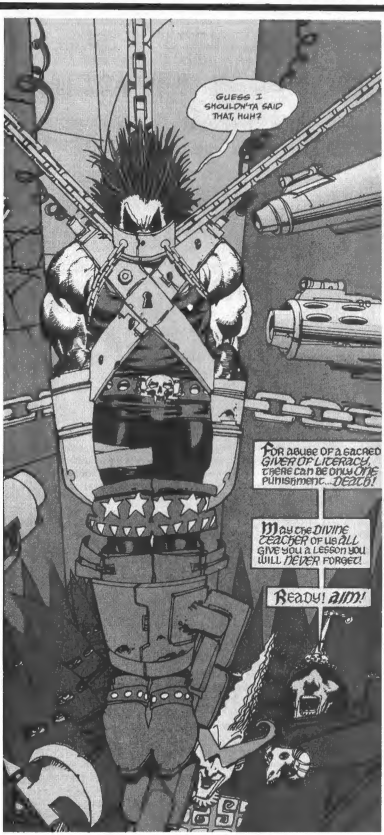
STEVE: Well, I think in certain ways, LOBO is much more accessible than THE FLASH. LOBO is not a superhero. The problem with THE FLASH was, The Flash could run fast and what do you do with it? It's one thing when you're reading a comic book and it comes out every eight or 10 weeks or whatnot. When it's one every week and all the guy can do is run fast, the audience gets tired because how many different ways can you have him use that speed? As opposed to Superman, who can do so many different things.

DAN: *But I did think the show evolved, and I enjoyed it greatly. The visual style was great and the scripts were fun. Why didn't it find an audience, do you think?*

CRAIG: Well, it found its audience, and unfortunately it wasn't large enough to keep it on the air. It found an audience that was very loyal to it.

STEVE: The same can be said for ALIEN NATION.

"We've been fortunate, working with brilliant people."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DAN: *Or perhaps BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, for example.*

STEVE: All of which had such a loyal, core audience, but it was just never going to get much bigger.

DAN: *Although I noticed the last episode of THE FLASH jumped up 20 rating points. But too little, too late by then.*

STEVE: We oversaw several episodes, but when LOBO really took off it sort of pulled us away and luckily we were at Warner Bros., which is doing both shows. But, as you say, it was an interesting experience, and there were several very good shows.

DAN: *Are they conceiving LOBO as a TV movie, a spinoff for a series?*

STEVE: We've been conceiving it as a two-hour pilot for a series. Our anticipation is it's too expensive of a pilot not to be amortized over another 13 weeks, and I think the network knows that.

CRAIG: One nice marriage here with LOBO is we have the hour, action, sci-fi background, but LOBO is a very funny show.

DAN: *Going from improv to comedy to writing dramatic TV, was that difficult or not?*

STEVE: It's funny. How it happened was, we'd written a REMINGTON STEELE, which, as you know, was sort of a light hour. And we sent it to Peter Fisher, who was on MURDER SHE WROTE so brilliantly for so many years. And he read it and he kept us busy for like two and a half years. He called and said, "You want to write a murder show?" And here I'd been eating crackers and soup and it's like, "Of course!" So we sort of just fell into doing dramatic, but all of our dramatic stuff we would always leaven with some comedy. So it's been a wonderful marriage for us.

DAN: *What's the business like? As crazy as the stories go?*

CRAIG: It's as crazy as you want it to be, or as little as you want it to be. We've been fortunate in having worked with brilliant people like Peter Fisher, Kenny Johnson in ALIEN NATION.

DAN: *He also did SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN, right?*

STEVE: Right. Both of those guys are old pros, and we couldn't have learned from better people.

CRAIG: They both ran such great shows. You could see how smooth an operation could be.

STEVE: The idea is to be as organized as you can, so that when the crises come up, you can handle them. Which there always will be.

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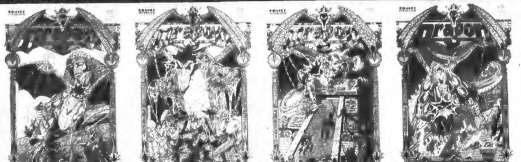

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"People can see Lobo in situations where they

ALAN

Alan Grant's name should be very familiar to comics aficionados, since his work seemingly appears everywhere. He scripts BATMAN, THE DEMON, and L.E.G.I.O.N. '91 for DC and was only recently the writer of Marvel's ROBOCOP. He is even more celebrated, though, for his long-running collaboration with writing partner John Wagner on Judge Dredd in his native Britain. He and Wagner are co-writing the forthcoming BATMAN-JUDGE DREDD team-up book, which is the subject of another talk with Grant coming up in COMICS INTERVIEW #101.

This issue's topic, however, is one of DC's newer and most popular major characters, the viciously violent but somehow absurd interstellar mercenary Lobo. Grant has been scripting the character on a regular basis in L.E.G.I.O.N. '91, and recently collaborated with Keith Giffen and Simon Bisley on the first LOBO mini-series. It proved to be such a great success that the team is reuniting for a regular LOBO series, which actually will be a continuous series of mini-series, each with a different storyline.

I originally interviewed both Simon Bisley and Alan Grant by telephone on the same day, and afterwards glowed with pride over how well the interviews had gone. Pride, of course, goeth before a fall — in this case, the demise of my tape recorder. Though it worked perfectly when I tested it just before the Bisley interview, it began malfunctioning horribly shortly after the interview began, leaving me with two indecipherable audio cassettes. (Of course the recorder had to wait for an expensive transatlantic call to collapse!) My thanks to Alan Grant for being understanding enough to do the interview again. In fact, as you will see, during the 24 hours between interviews both of us had time to think more about what was said, so the second interview turned out even better than the first . . .

PETER SANDERSON: *What are your feelings about doing LOBO solo stories on a regular basis?*

ALAN GRANT: Keith Giffen and I were reluctant to commit ourselves to doing LOBO on a regular basis because we were afraid he is, at heart, such a one-dimensional character that we wouldn't be able to sustain it. I think you were suggesting this last night: After attacking sacred cows such as religion, family, teaching (in other Lobo stories), where do we go after that? Well, the short answer is, I don't know, but we'll have fun getting to that position.

PETER: *Yesterday you were saying that LOBO was both an action-adventure series and a parody of an action-adventure series. Do the readers see it as both an adventure series and a parody, or does LOBO have two separate audiences?*

ALAN: I can't say that I've ever thought about it. I expect that there are two different audiences, but that they overlap to some extent. I know from experience in comics across the board, you get

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might want to let off steam and aren't able to."

GRANT

letters from both ends of the spectrum: letters from people who hate it and letters from people who love it — the same comic, the same story, the same character.

On BATMAN I get letters and drawings from 4- and 5-year-olds as well as from 16- and 17-year-olds who've been reading BATMAN all their lives. While I don't think I write stories particularly to meet the needs or desires of these people, I do have to constantly bear in mind while I'm writing BATMAN that a kid of age five should not be traumatized. By the same token, I shouldn't want to give some 70-year-old reader a heart attack by doing something with Batman that hasn't been done with him for 50 years. I suppose, in that respect, I'm a conservative.

PETER: *Though LOBO must bring out your more anarchistic side.*

ALAN: *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *After all, LOBO doesn't seem to me to be designed* not *to traumatize 5-year-olds.*

Can you describe LOBO as a post-modernist book in that it is an action-adventure that is self-consciously ironic?

ALAN: Well, I suppose you could say that, to a certain extent, yeah. Reviewers, interviewers, or critics in general tend to give more meaning or give more depth to something like LOBO than I myself, as a writer, would give it. We're just out to have a laugh, basically.

PETER: *You said yesterday this is not a heavy thematic book; this is an entertainment, a comedy.*

ALAN: Exactly, yes. It's basically an entertainment. I would like to think that when people finish reading LOBO they wouldn't leave it in a plastic bag where no one would see it for 20 years, but it might appreciate in value. I would rather that they left it on a train or a bus or took it along to their local doctor's surgery or to the kids' ward at the hospital and left it off there. When I was a kid, my brothers and I were never allowed to save up comics. We could read all we wanted, but we weren't allowed to collect them. The sort of unspoken rule was if someone gave you a dozen new comics or you bought a dozen new comics, a dozen of the older ones went to somebody else. And to a large extent I've always seen comics as something I don't mind not keeping.

PETER: *Would you say that the appeal of LOBO is that he can do anything he wants; he has a total lack of inhibitions?*

ALAN: Yeah, I think that's very true. One of the things that people appreciate about Lobo is they can see him in situations where they, themselves, might want to let off steam and aren't able to, where Lobo is a kick-ass guy who, if he wants it, he doesn't see any obstacle to his getting it. If people get in his way, then they have to pay the price. Which is a pretty ridiculous attitude to take, but at the same time, if you're as powerful as he is, you can probably get away with it.

PETER: *The way you phrased it yesterday was that LOBO is a "psychotic farce," implying that if you read it in the*

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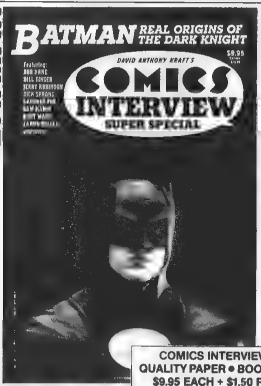

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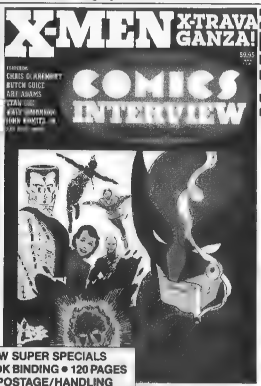

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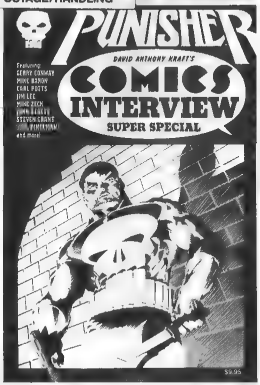

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"I don't believe in censorship, other than self-censorship."

proper spirit you're dipping into madness just for the period of reading the book, that you can indulge these emotions without harming anyone, as a form of play.

ALAN: Yeah. I was thinking about that more today, actually. I don't know if I want to qualify that or not. It might be a good idea for me to say that that's the case in the medium of comic books.

PETER: *We've been talking about Lobo's lack of inhibitions. Does this mean that sooner or later we'll get to see Lobo's sex life?*

ALAN: Well, quite possibly. But to be honest, I think I would leave that one to Keith to write. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *You said that Lobo was one of the few U.S. comics characters who would fit into British comics, not just because of the violence but because of the irreverence —*

ALAN: Yeah.

PETER: *— and you also said that you knew of a lot of people who were into heavy metal music who also liked LOBO. Why is that?*

ALAN: I'm not sure why that should be. My daughter is a heavy metal fan but, try as I might, I can't get her to explain the attraction of heavy metal music any more than I was able to explain to my parents why I liked **The Rolling Stones** and **The Animals** and bands like that.

PETER: *Does it involve a certain release of violent passions or a certain air of rebellion against convention?*

ALAN: Yeah. I think that's got a large part to play in it. The fact that the people reading it are over a certain age, they have a certain amount of energy, they have a lot of hormones going wild in their bodies, they want something to latch onto that can give them explosive relief. And I think that reading the violent exploits of a character like Lobo can be one of these ways. I can't say often enough that while I strongly disapprove of violence, I would much rather see it kept in comics than see it in real life.

PETER: *So LOBO would be a form of catharsis — a release of these urges — rather than an encouragement of them?*

ALAN: Well, I'm sure — there are arguments for both cases. My personal viewpoint is that people who're going to be affected by something that they read in a comic, to cause them to go and commit some sort of crime, they were well down the wrong path in the first place, and could have been triggered by a paragraph in a newspaper, could've been triggered by the look on somebody's face, could have been triggered by what they read on a MacDonald's hamburger menu. It's nothing at all to do with the actual content of what they're reading. Anything could be a trigger in certain circumstances.

At the same time, I don't absolve comics' responsibility. I think I said yesterday I don't believe in censorship of any sort other than self-censorship. *(Laughter.)* I'm sure that people who write things like the CARE BEARS or COUNT DUCKULA are going to say they find it sick that comics I write are next to their thing. I don't know, there's too much of comics for one market instead of 10,000 small individual markets.

PETER: *The same audience probably doesn't read both SUPERMAN and LOBO, much less CARE BEARS and LOBO?*

ALAN: I wouldn't think so. I mentioned yesterday that a fair percentage of L.E.G.I.O.N. '91 readers who write in and complain about Lobo's part in the book would rather he was out of it completely. Whereas I get people who read the LOBO mini-series who say they would love to read LOBO on a regular basis, only they don't feel they can stump up $1.50 every month for a book like L.E.G.I.O.N. which is full of all these wimpy people. Why can't they get rid of the rest of L.E.G.I.O.N. and just make it the Legion of Lobos? Which actually might be an idea *(laughter)* that might surface in the near future.

PETER: *What is it like working with Keith Giffen and Simon Bisley?*

ALAN: Well, I prefer to work with

Artwork by Semeiks and Smith.

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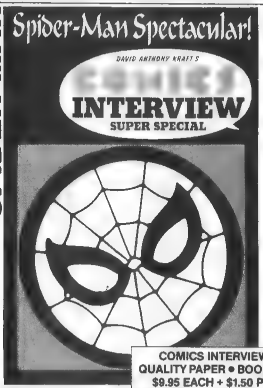

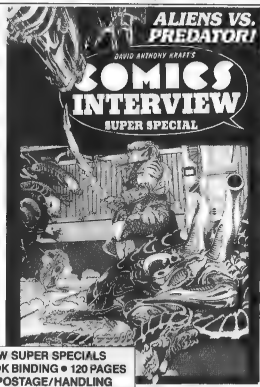

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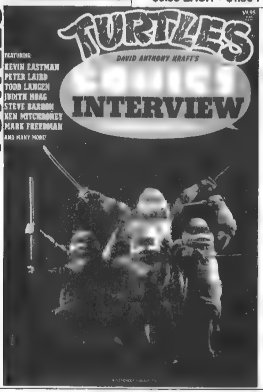

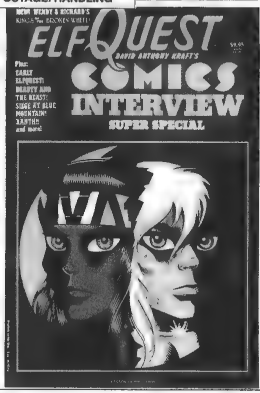

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On Bisley: "I think the guy is probably a genius."

similarly deranged people to myself, and both of them certainly fill the bill. The term "Genius" is bandied about far too much in all walks of life these days. I'm not sure the best has actually been brought out in him yet, but as an ideas person, **Keith Giffen** just never stops, there's always something new coming out of him. And if you stop him halfway through an idea he's explaining and say, "Look, Keith, I don't like that," you give him five seconds to think and he's got an alternative version you could use. There are very, very few people like that who can produce ideas as regularly and with such consistency as he does. As far as **Simon Bisley's** concerned, I personally think the guy is probably a genius — when it comes to painting comics characters at least. He's also a heavy metal fan, and underneath it all he's actually quite a nice guy. In fact, he's a really nice guy.

PETER: *Now, the new LOBO series is a series of three- to four-issue mini-series, each following right after the previous one, and there might be different artists in future stories, right?*

ALAN: The plan at the moment is that **Simon Bisley** will do the first twelve issues, and other artists will follow. After that, I'm not quite sure what the stories will be. There'll be all of Lobo's illegitimate children getting together to assassinate him. And at the same time I'm working on another one called "A Contract on God." I'm not sure at all what the other LOBO storylines will involve. I'm taking them one — or rather, we're taking them — two at a time because we're working on two at the same time.

PETER: *And the stories seem to be revolving around which sacred cow you attack next?*

ALAN: Exactly, yeah.

PETER: *So you go after the concept of family in the story about illegitimate children, and religion in "A Contract on God," and in the LOBO Christmas Special you even go after Santa Claus.*

ALAN: Right, exactly. I don't know what will come next. Maybe it will be automobile manufacturers. Republican politicians. Conservative politicians. I don't know. *(Laughter.)* **Andy Helfer** expressed the desire to write a LOBO mini-series, and I believe Andy wanted to approach it from a CITIZEN KANE-type point of view.

PETER: *When we were talking about the possible LOBO TV series, you said it would be a great mistake to demonstrate in it that Lobo has a heart of gold —*

I'VE NEVER BEEN SO EMBARRASSED IN ALL MY LIFE!
WHY COULDN'T WE HAVE TAKEN ONE OF THOSE LOVELY CRUISERS? OR A HOVER-LIMO?
DO YOU EVER WASH THIS THING?

Giffen layouts with finished pencils by Simon Bisley, from DC's LOBO limited series.

"Most American television is pap. It's made to a

really high standard but there's no hard edges."

because he has none.

ALAN: It would be, yeah. I understand why people in television, in other media, have to screw around with ideas taken from our own medium. The BATMAN movie is a case in point. I thought, after fifty years of treating the killer of Batman's parents the way that DC has treated him, for the movie to say, "Oh, that old continuity shit doesn't exist; for fifty years your readers have been reading the wrong thing" — I think the comics fans deserve something for their fandom. I think that to be treated like that is something they didn't deserve.

PETER: *Still, I've read interviews with Tim Burton in which he points out that DC has made alterations in its own BATMAN continuity over the years.*

ALAN: Yeah, I can appreciate that, especially from a movie point of view, because they're not interested in fifty years of continuity. All they're interested in is the box office.

TV's going to be the same. Let's say they put LOBO on TV. They won't be able to get away with showing him as just a swaggering bully because advertisers won't allow that, because the American moral majority won't allow that, just because *(laughter)* most American television is pap. It's made to a really high standard, but there's no hard edges. We don't get your news programs over here. What we get are your sitcoms and your cop programs, stuff like that.

PETER: *Oh, I'm not going to disagree with you about the quality of American television.*

ALAN: *(Laughter.)* So Lobo just wouldn't be able to exist; they'd have him off the air halfway through the first show. So they've got to make out he's got a heart of gold in order to keep him on the air in the first place. I can appreciate that.

I just hope that they do it properly, that when I see the show, I'll be able to say, "Well, that's the character that Keith and I wrote." If something's taken out of Lobo and they've bastardized it, it wouldn't be the same to me.

PETER: *Who would you want to see play Lobo, if you could choose anyone?*

ALAN: That's actually quite hard. I'm trying desperately to think of someone. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *You don't have to. It's not an important question.*

ALAN: No, but it's an interesting question. I couldn't see any established actor playing him. Nobody specializes, really, in playing bad guys. Maybe somebody like **Lee Van Cleef** could have carried it off 25 or 30 years ago.

Previous page: More Bisley over Giffen. Here: Splash from L.E.G.I.O.N. 91 #29.

PETER: *You'd want someone with more of a heavy metal sensibility?*

ALAN: Yeah.

PETER: *Maybe you'd want to get a rock musician.*

ALAN: That would probably be a good idea; a lead singer from one of the Gothic punk bands, something like that. Maybe **Gene Simmons,** the lead singer with KISS, the heavy metal band that used to paint their faces the way Lobo does. Somebody like that would certainly fit physically, and I think that the irreverent attitude would probably fit as well. So, again, we're coming back to rock music. LOBO's got a lot more in common with rock music.

"Bill Sienkiewicz is a recent influence. It was about

SIMON

Simon Bisley is the British artist who collaborated on the first LOBO mini-series with Keith Giffen and Alan Grant, and he will be working with them again on the first year of new LOBO mini-series. DC readers first became aware of Bisley's work through his remarkable painted covers for THE DOOM PATROL. He is the artist on the forthcoming team-up book pairing Batman and Judge Dredd, which he discusses in the upcoming COMICS INTERVIEW #101, and in the future he will be doing a BATMAN graphic novel written by Neil Gaiman.

As those of you who have read the interview with Alan Grant in this issue already know, I had to redo this interview after my tape recorder died a horrible, lingering death, so once again you will be seeing references to a previous interview. My thanks to Simon Bisley for doing the interview over.

PETER SANDERSON: *It was a copy of Marvel's THE AVENGERS that got you interested in comics?*

SIMON BISLEY: Yeah, that was about 1972, I think. It was a picture that depicted the original Power Man lifting Captain America over his head. *(Laughter.)* And that really impressed me. So it was really from then on that I started getting all the U.S. reproductions of Marvel. I wasn't aware of DC at the time. I was getting THE AVENGERS, and then PLANET OF THE APES came out; I was getting THE HULK, stuff like this.

PETER: *You've mentioned Frank Frazetta and Bill Sienkiewicz as some of the artists who influenced your work.*

SIMON: These influences came along a lot later — I didn't have any influences to start off with. I mean, I wasn't even particularly interested in actually drawing these characters or anything of this type.

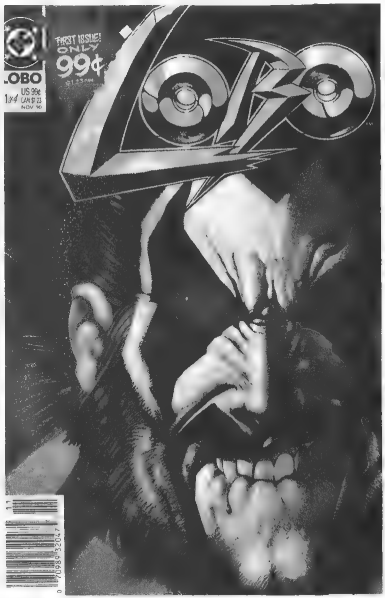
Bill Sienkiewicz is a recent influence. I should say, two years ago I started picking his stuff up. Six years ago I started looking at **Frazetta.**

PETER: *What about Frank Miller as an influence?*

SIMON: I'd say it was about five years ago I saw **Frank Miller's** DARK KNIGHT. I picked it up; I was just stunned by it; I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe how far forward comics had come, how advanced they were.

PETER: *Then you hadn't been reading comics for a while?*

SIMON: I hadn't been, not really. In



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two years ago that I started picking his stuff up."

BISLEY

"I detest art teachers. I think they're failed artists.

DARK KNIGHT, you've got Batman bounced against a sewer with a bullet hole in his chest, and some woman with swastikas stamped on her buttocks. I said, "Wow! This is great! *(Laughter.)* This is what I want to do."

PETER: *You had gone to art school, but the people there discouraged you from doing comics?*

SIMON: Well, they were just a bunch of wankers, basically. I detest art teachers. I think they're failed artists, you know. *(Laughter.)* They discourage people with talent, basically. That's the impression I got.

They didn't like me because I was too flashy, too stylized, and they wanted me to regress and go back to the roots of things. I couldn't see any point in that. I knew what direction I wanted and felt I was progressing quite well. Eventually, it became kind of a standoff where they ignored me, I ignored them. I just got on with it. They couldn't really control me. It wasn't that I was rebellious or anything. I was set in my ways and they weren't prepared to remove me from that state of mind. Which was a good thing, really.

PETER: *You said last time that although there were artists who had influenced you, that your style had always been your own, and that you thought it was distinctive because you didn't copy anyone else.*

SIMON: It's hard for me to analyze, really. I looked at a lot of **Frazetta** stuff, but I always made a conscious effort never to copy it. It wasn't so much the actual artwork as much as the energy that **Bill Sienkiewicz's** or **Frank Frazetta's** work could produce, a tremendous kind of energy. I just want to get that kind of energy across. It's a culmination of everything. It's a culmination of life and everything you see, isn't it, your experiences and everything else, as well as the actual comic strips you read, or look at, at least.

PETER: *How did you get into the comics business?*

SIMON: That was through a friend of mine I'd been at school with for seven years, and he eventually became an editor in London for some car magazines, and London is a very small place, very close-knit; everybody knows everybody. And he said to me, "How about coming down to London and showing some of these guys I know at Titan Books some of your work?" I didn't that time. When, a couple of years later, he asked me again, I said, "Okay," and I gave him some stuff. At this time the work I was producing was to try to get into a degree course, actually, while I was enjoying the army. He showed the stuff to some of his friends and got a good reaction.

A few days later, in London, I talked to some guy behind a big oaken desk who offered me large amounts of money. I found out there were too many restrictions, and he wanted what he wanted, and in the end I was just a puppet for him, to produce a painting that he visualized. So I didn't get any satisfaction out of doing that at all. Plus in the early days it was difficult to get paid. I was very inexperienced. It was a pretty shabby affair.

I gained experience, eventually, and this guy who introduced me, he started off as my agent; I eventually realized that 25% was a large amount of money to give him, so I dumped him. I found I was getting the work anyway.

PETER: *What was the first assignment you got that was satisfying to you?*

SIMON: *(Laughter.)* I don't know if I've really had time to sit back and think which assignment satisfied me the most.

No, LOBO is the job I've derived the most satisfaction from — that and the odd, individual painting. If you can paint the painting you want, you derive some satisfaction from that, as opposed to just being a puppet, just being manipulated.

Bisley's only SWAMP THING cover painting. Next page: LOBO illustrations for Holiday Special.

They discourage people with talent, basically."

LOBO PARAMILITARY HOLIDAY SPECIAL

It sounds awfully heavy; it's not as heavy as that, really.

PETER: *Mark Waid gave you the first assignment from DC that you accepted, which was painting covers for THE DOOM PATROL?*

SIMON: Yeah. That's right. I still am delighted to continue painting DOOM PATROL covers. It then all more-or-less flowed from there. I began getting work gradually from DC.

PETER: *Although you enjoy doing painted covers, you find equal or even greater satisfaction in doing black-and-white line art for comics?*

SIMON: That's right. I find color work can become labored. It can detract from the story. It's also far, far too time-consuming. My energy level is like a container full of liquid. When I'm painting, the liquid goes down kind of

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"To paint a thing, you first draw it. The energy is used up."

gradually and eventually empties. With black-and-white artwork there's a bigger reserve, and you can continue hammering out this black-and-white artwork and sustaining a high level of energy, and it's easier. Because when you paint something, you initially draw or ink it down, and that energy is used up. And the minute you start to paint, it's almost like you're having to paint that picture all over again. But with LOBO, which is instantaneous . . . you're just literally putting it down and getting it over with. As long as it comes across and tells the story, I can't see any point to rendering something to that degree.

PETER: *So black-and-white artwork has more energy?*

SIMON: Oh, absolutely. I can't explain that. But it just comes from my experience of when I have inked something, and then I paint it, the power seems to have gone. I don't know why that is. I think with black and white, the image is instant, and if you get a good, powerful picture, it's there. But when a picture is painted, you have to labor over it for a longer period of time. Although people say, "Isn't that a beautiful little painting?" and everything else, I think it loses its effect. **Sienkiewicz** is, I think, the ultimate in that medium, because his painted stuff translates beautifully to comics.

PETER: *When I asked you before why people found Lobo so appealing, you said it was because he was totally uninhibited. Is that something that you can relate to yourself?*

SIMON: Yeah, I can.

PETER: *You were also describing LOBO as a farce, as a parody of action-adventure stories, and saying Lobo was appealing because he could do anything he wanted to, and unleash his darker impulses.*

SIMON: Well, you just answered it. Because I think LOBO is the essence of comics today. It's got the black humor; it's got the superhero feel to it; it's got the comic side to it; it's got the action; it's got the characters; it's got everything. You get up Saturday morning, pick up your LOBO, and have a good read and have a good laugh. It's not too complicated. I think this is what comics should be. I mean, not necessarily just like that.

But yeah, someone gets on his nerves, and he just kills them. I mean *(laughter)* it's that kind of attitude he's got. He's not restricted in any way; he just does what he wants to do. Which I think is really a defense, because he's out on his own in this huge universe with these very strange, colorful, dangerous characters.

DOOM PATROL painting with Alan Moore-ish characters.

So he acts as he does to survive, I suppose.

PETER: *When we were growing up, you didn't see this kind of black comedy in mainstream comics.*

SIMON: It's a bit sad that we can laugh at people getting killed because they can't spell. It makes you wonder how that can be amusing, but for some reason it is.

PETER: *It's interesting that you say that Lobo's attitude is a defense mechanism for living in a dangerous world. Do you suppose the readers feel insecure about living in a dangerous world and that Lobo provides a catharsis for them by acting the way they would like to?*

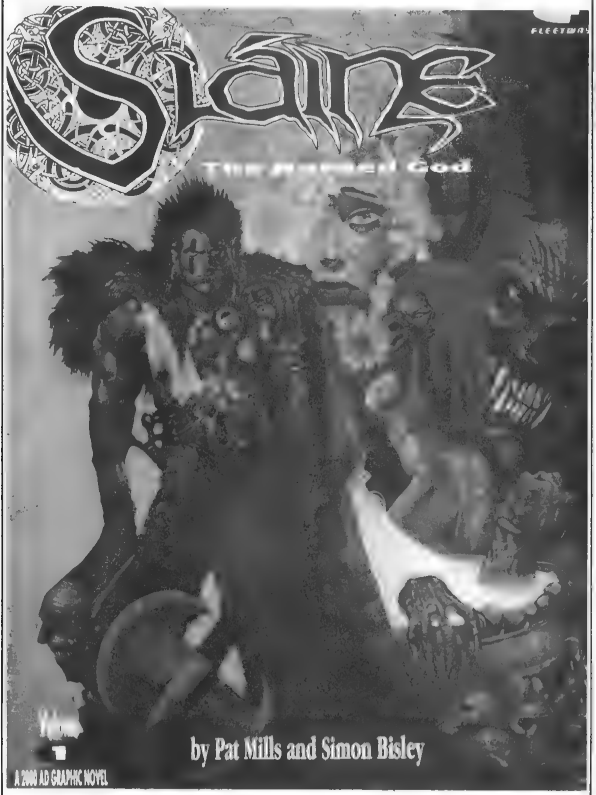
SIMON: He can release that. He's doing everything they would want to do and would like to do, but they don't. I mean, we've got our fears in life and everything else, but Lobo basically has no fears, and he's not intimidated by anything — or maybe he is, and that's why he acts as he does.

But some people just deal with it on a very simplistic level: They read it because they enjoy seeing people get killed.

I'd never do a **Dave McKean** version of LOBO or anything like that because it wouldn't suit. All I want people to do is to pick it up, have a good laugh, roll it up in their pocket and throw it in their comic collection — and that's that, you know?

LOBO just proves you don't have to

"My artwork clashed with the story in Slaine, and it was



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contradictory to the story because it was anti-Conan."

Here and previous page: Examples of Simon's various styles/influences. Both are from Volume One of Fleetway Publications' SLAINE: THE HORNED GOD, written by Pat Mills.

paint or render something to the extreme for it to sell. LOBO's done in a very crude manner, yet it sells more, I think, than SLAINE does, whose artwork is fully painted. Mind you, SLAINE was a very boring story.

PETER: *Most of our readers probably don't know about SLAINE. Could you tell us about it?*

SIMON: I always wanted to work on CONAN THE BARBARIAN, because I always adored **Robert E. Howard's** stories when I was young. I'm still trying to do CONAN, actually. My artwork clashed terribly with the story in SLAINE because I was depicting Slaine very much like Conan, larger than life, and Conan's world, with the large-breasted women and everything, and it was contradictory to the story, because it was anti-CONAN. So it just didn't work out particularly well.

I was just too restricted. I didn't feel I had enough freedom on it. SLAINE lacked direction; it couldn't make up its mind whether it was going to be total sword and sorcery with wizards and goblins.

But it sells well. The story and the artwork clashed because they didn't go together. **Pat Mills** and I had different views on things. I had the CONANesque sword and sorcery, bloodthirsty view of things, whereas Pat had the more historical, factual interpretation, and he just saw it completely differently. Although things didn't work out between us both, the book sold well in this country; it was a best seller for a while.

PETER: *How do you like working with Keith Giffen, Alan Grant and John Wagner on your DC projects?*

SIMON: I love it. I think I found the writers I really enjoy to work with, because they have the same sense of humor as me.

While I'm saying that, the kind of stuff that Keith, Alan and John do is not something that I would choose to do myself . . . I could do something more obscure, less macho, as it were. I find I'm becoming typecast. I wish someone gave me an assignment, say to depict a rabbit in a little field with a young child with a flower in her hair. I would like to try doing something like that. I wouldn't have to try; I can do something like that. In fact, it's more natural, my doing that kind of thing, than it is doing this barbaric kind of artwork.

PETER: *What would you like to do in comics, then?*

SIMON: It depends on what mood I'm in on that particular day, I suppose. My thoughts vary depending on what mood I'm in. I can't really say now.

"I've seen the first draft, and the writers seem clicked in

KEITH GIFFEN

BOB SODARO: *How's it feel to be a super celebrity, huh?*
KEITH GIFFEN: Oh, yeah. *(Laughter.)* Yeah, of *all* the characters — *(Laughter.)* I keep remembering when **Art Young** and I pitched the LOBO book to **Dick Giordano,** the main selling point we kept coming back to was: "Well, at *least* it will sell as good as L.E.G.I.O.N. '90." Talk about being blind sided.

BOB: *I take it, then, you didn't expect all the fervor over the character?*
KEITH: I thought it would be a good, *healthy* selling book but I *certainly* did not expect everyone to go kind of Lobo crazy. Especially because, you know, it's such a *reprehensible* character. Over at Marvel they've got the Wolverine character and a lot of time seems to be spent trying to give him desirable attributes so they can still call him a *hero.* We've never played around with Lobo. Lobo is probably the single most reprehensible character that DC has; and he's incredibly popular, which is *frightening* in a way.
BOB: *What possessed you to do a completely reprehensible character?*
KEITH: Well . . . well, first of all, Lobo was kind of fun. Any kind of lowlife is kind of fun to play with in a comic book. The LOBO mini-series was just . . . I'm kind of sick to death of the whole dark, gritty superhero trend that *dominates* comics nowadays. The LOBO mini-series specifically was meant to be put out there as an indictment of the genre. We played it very broad, very tongue in cheek, overblown and exaggerated. I'd *like* to think that the character is popular because it does sort of put a tongue-in-cheek laugh to these kind of characters, but there's a little voice in the back of my mind saying, "No no, there's a lot of people out there taking it at face value." That's a little unnerving.
BOB: *How did the TV series come about? Did someone approach you?*
KEITH: The only thing I know about the LOBO TV thing is that Jenette asked **Art Young,** myself, and **Andy Helfer** to sort of sit in on a lunch with some people who were, I believe, writers who were going to be working on some sort of a treatment for **Roger Corman.** I could be wrong on this but I believe it's his production company that is trying to put this whole thing together for CBS. And

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to the fact that it was never meant to be taken seriously."

we discussed it. I was kind of curious to find out how much of the character would remain intact. You know, it was bad enough that Lobo's in a comic book, are you going to put him on TV intact? *(Laughter.)*

BOB: *This was your first clue that TV was interested?*

KEITH: It came out of nowhere.

BOB: *When did this happen?*

KEITH: January, December, somewhere around there. I'm *horrible* with dates. I'm even worse with time, I have no time sense at all. But it was a ways back; far enough back that I've already seen the first draft. And to the best of my knowledge they really seemed — at least the people who were there, the writers — seemed clicked into the fact that it was never meant to be taken seriously, that Lobo was meant to be sort of a satire or a parody or an *indictment* of these kind of amoral heroes that seem to be so popular today. They really seemed to want to play off of that.

Now, my attitude towards Lobo has always been . . . that's about as much thought as Lobo's had. He kills, Lobo kills; he's one joke with the same punch line. Actually, you can do any amount of Lobo stories but every story has that same punch line: "And they die." Pretty much a one-dimensional character. And, of course, the TV people were talking about ways of fleshing him out while not losing the edge, and also not dancing too far over that line that Standards and Practices always draws. I saw the first draft of it and that's about it, that's *all* I know at this point.

BOB: *In the first draft they're following the comics pretty closely?*

Previous page: Cover painting to LOBO #3 by Simon Bisley.
This page: One-pager illustration by Keith Giffen and inker Al Gordon.

"Lobo: Aspects of his personality were softened for

DON'T BLAME ME, MR. BIGSHOT! IF YOU HADN'T BEEN--
GASSED! GASSED WHILE RELIEVIN' MYSELF! THE ONLY WAY THEY COULDA TAKEN ME
AN YOU KNOW I GUESS IT WOULDVE KILLED YA! YE'LL "LOOK OUT FOR THE STARSHIP!"
IT'S ONLY THE SIZE AS A FRAGGIN' PLANET!

TV. He's still a totally self-centered, amoral bastard."

KEITH: The first draft is . . . there are a lot of sequences in there that follow the mini-series, okay. And they did seem to have the Lobo character pretty well in hand. Of course, certain aspects of his personality were *softened* for TV, they would *have* to be, but one thing that came through in the script was that he was still a totally self-centered, amoral bastard. Of course, then Jenette looks at it, and the editor on the book looks at it, I believe **Dan Raspler** read through it, and God knows how many other people read through it, and then comment on it to the writers. As far as I can tell that process has been gone through, and that's where we sit right now.

BOB: *Have you had any additional input into it other than having it based on your character?*

KEITH: Mine and **Roger Slifer's** character. Not really. I mean, Jenette is very good about bringing in creators, or even just the people who happen to be working on the book at the time, when it comes to these little ventures into other media. How much of a say you can honestly have is up for debate. But it's nice to be approached because they're certainly under no obligation. I may have come up with the visual for Lobo, and the idea that he's this merciless killer, and then **Roger Slifer** comes along and gives him the name and just by writing him adds to the character — everyone that *touches* the character *adds* a little bit to the character —

BOB: *Why do you think LOBO would appeal to someone who wants to do a TV program, as opposed to someone who would want to do a movie?*

KEITH: I haven't the slightest idea unless they were interested in the more tongue-in-cheek aspects of it.

BOB: *Does it have a comedic feel about it?*

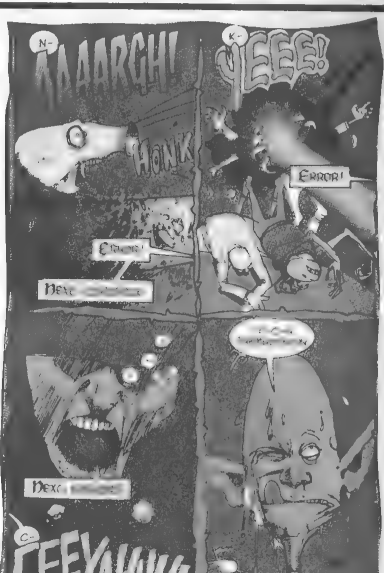
KEITH: I would *hope* so. I don't know, maybe I'm wrong, maybe I'm just more perverse than I give myself credit for, but I thought that the LOBO mini-series was a funny four issues.

BOB: *Not a throwback to the POW ZAP BAP of the '60s BATMAN, I hope.*

KEITH: No. As a matter of fact it was treated pretty straight, it wasn't played any more broad than the mini-series was. I was actually amazed at how much of the mini-series made it into the first draft.

BOB: *Do you have any idea, are they in production now?*

KEITH: I don't know, I haven't heard. I would assume that if there was a second draft, DC would definitely see it, and, like I say, Jenette's *very* good about that so that means *I'll* see it.



BOB: *So they haven't even gotten to casting.*

KEITH: No. I mean, when I do Lobo I . . . everyone who does a character sees a particular person. But no, there's been no talk about casting, there has —

BOB: *What would your dream cast be?*

KEITH: Bill Paxton as Lobo, I've kind of always seen the character as him. But . . . it comes down to, to be perfectly honest, this thing could be dead in the water and I just haven't heard about it yet.

BOB: *That would certainly be tragic. Do you think that the interest in it would stem from the popularity of FLASH being on TV now, and THE ROCKETEER coming out, and BATMAN?*

KEITH: Well, of course. I think that the interest in it can be traced *directly* to the success of the other comic-book characters that have been translated to film or to TV, THE FLASH and BATMAN and DICK TRACY to a certain extent, and the fact that THE ROCKETEER is

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"A lot of comics would adapt well to fantasy movies."

coming out, and if you want to push it even *farther* you can say ROBOCOP and the quote comic-book unquote movies that are out there that are immensely popular. There are a lot of *great* characters in comics that would adapt well to fantasy movies or science-fiction movies, or just the knuckleheaded check-your-brains-at-the-door movies. It's this great untapped source of material and I think a lot of film and TV people are finally beginning to turn in this direction.

The unfortunate thing is that a lot of . . . let's say LOBO gets on CBS, everything goes well and it gets on the air, if people expect the kind of special effects budget that is afforded to a TV show like STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION or even THE FLASH, if they expect to see Lobo zipping around on his space cycle with perfect matting, I don't think that's going to happen. I really think that LOBO would be better off handled almost in a MAX HEADROOM-like manner, in terms of it just looked like they raided every thrift shop in London for the sets. There was a JUSTICE LEAGUE — I went through this with JUSTICE LEAGUE, too, and it actually got to the second draft, and of course it was supposed to be a movie to go into a regular TV show if it was popular enough, and when you read through some of these first drafts you realize these guys are writing multi-billion-dollar movies, they're certainly not writing for TV or for a low budget.

The way I always saw it was JUSTICE LEAGUE should hit TV as a half-hour situation comedy like BARNEY MILLER. BARNEY MILLER with superheroes.

BOB: *That's certainly an interesting idea.*

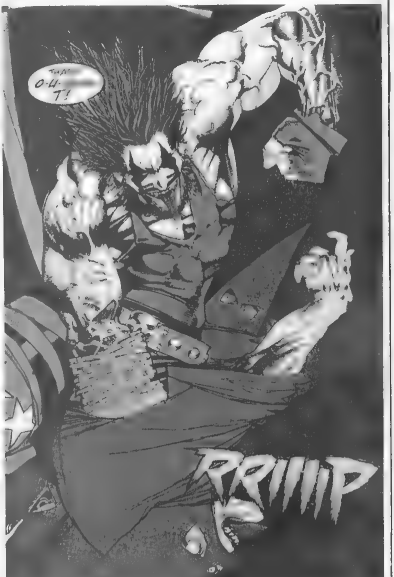
KEITH: It's almost like the book: They gather in the room, they go off and come back, you get your jokes out of what they did. One of the great things about BARNEY MILLER was they made stuff that shouldn't be funny *funny.* When one of the cops goes out and then comes back all disheveled and explains how he chased a guy and the guy was shooting at him and he fell down a manhole and got all covered in guck and climbed out of another manhole and tackled the guy, goes through this whole story about it, it's *funny.* It's certainly funnier than following that guy *doing* it, there's an element of danger. But him coming back and telling it, it can be funny because he's obviously come back so he's okay, so you can find the humor in that.

I thought it would work good with JUSTICE LEAGUE because then they can *talk* about having met Darkseid or whoever and you don't have to worry about blowing millions of dollars on special effects. They just come in and tell their weird little story. Wheel in Guy Gardner in a poniced-up ice cube and tell this big tale of woe about Captain Cold without having to worry about having to come up with a freeze gun.

BOB: *That's actually pretty funny, it probably would work. I don't know that the fanboys out in the market would appreciate it.*

KEITH: I don't think the TV people give a damn about the fanboys. They deal in *millions* of viewers, comics are dealing in at best, to put a real optimistic twist on it, hundreds of thousands of readers. I'm sure that when **Tim Burton** was doing BATMAN he certainly did not have the people that read BATMAN in mind, he had all those *others* out there in mind who probably don't even know BATMAN is still being published. I can't tell you how many times — "What do you do for a living?" "I work for DC Comics." "What do they do?" "BATMAN, SUPERMAN, WONDER WOMAN." "Oh, they're still putting them out?"

BOB: *Right, anything that doesn't inter-*



"You can make yourself crazy following everything."

sect with my ordinary life doesn't happen.

KEITH: Pretty much so, yeah. So if LOBO makes it, even as a video game, why should they cleave real close or almost religiously follow what's been laid down in the comic book? No, they've got to take the points from the comic that would work best in their medium, so it's not going to be a religious translation. And, look, if they came to me and said they're turning Lobo into a real nice guy, playing him like Shane, and they're taking the black off and making him like Brother Power the Geek, there's nothing I can do. I would sit there and go, "Well, bad idea I think, it's not the Lobo I'm doing, but fine, you go and do yours and I'll just keep doing mine."

BOB: *Do you think that would pain you greatly, to see this character that you've worked on so long to be translated with a completely different viewpoint?*

KEITH: No. What would pain me would be if something does happen with Lobo, or *any* character that I'm working on, and it becomes by some miracle *enormously* popular, if then DC turned to me and said, "Your book should reflect what *they're* doing." In other words, **Eddie Murphy** is Lobo and then they come to me and say, "Play Lobo more like **Eddie Murphy**." That would pain me. But no, however a character is translated to film or TV. . . I think **Stephen King** once said, probably put it best, that when you sign the rights of a book to film or TV people, your best thing to do is just take the book, kiss it good-bye, and hope its new parents will treat it nice. You can make yourself crazy following everything around.

BOB: *Yeah, I'm sure you could.*

KEITH: I'd be disappointed because I think that the Lobo character is strong enough to be out there the way that he is, but it wouldn't make me crazy or cause me any sleepless nights.

BOB: *And, of course, you would be making some royalties on it.*

KEITH: I don't know how that works out. I know that I get the creator's royalty on the LOBO comics, but I don't know how that translates to other media, though you don't walk away from these things empty-handed to the best of my knowledge. I find it hard to say that any

GO NOW I'M A DE...VERY BOY AN...ER!
ONE OF THESE DAYS I'M GONNA CUT SOME VERY IMPORTANT PEOPLE INTO SOME VERY SMALL
"I NEED THE PRISONER ALIVE," JEEZ, HE MUST'VE SAID IT A DOZEN TIMES. CREEP REALLY MAXED ON IT.
HELL, DOX SHOULD KNOW BY NOW--

"I wish I had more to tell you about this."

"AGGASSIN TO ROYALTY AN' SCOURGE OF THE COSMOS"--THAT THE ONE?
LET ME BE FRANK, MISTER. I AM NOT IMPRESSED!
KA-
WE RUN A TIGHT SHIP HERE THERE'S NO PLACE FOR GRANDSTANDIN' PSYCHOS!
WE ARE THE LAW, SEE?
YOU REMEMBER THAT AN WE'LL BE ALONG JUST FINE!
TAKE THIS PRISONER. YOU'RE HERE FOR...SHE BROKE THE LAW--BAM! WE LOCK HER UP.
NO PUSSYFOOTIN'. NO MOLLYCODDLIN'! BAM! JUST LIKE THAT
C'MON. I'LL TAKE YOU DOWN--
--AN' WATCH YA'R STEP!
MAKE ONE MOVE OUT O' LINE AN IT'S--

corporation has the concerns of the creators uppermost in their mind, but I guess it's kind of the decent thing to do. Even your corporate structure can bend enough to do something decent for people, and I don't think DC would ever put themselves in a **Siegel and Shuster** position again.

BOB: *I'm sure they got enough bad press on that over the years.*

KEITH: And even then the whole story hasn't come out. I've read a lot of what Neal says about it, a lot of the **Siegel and Shuster** side, right, but I've heard very little about DC's side. So I'm not coming *down* on DC because I don't know the whole story so it's very hard for me to —

BOB: *One of the best perspectives I heard on it is it wasn't a nice thing that happened but that's the way business was done then. It's inappropriate to put our sensibilities and the way we do things now on the way they did things then.*

KEITH: True.

BOB: *You can't fault somebody for doing that because 50 years ago that's the way things were done. You can but —*

KEITH: You can maybe fault them on a moral level, but in terms of any kind of legality the company was perfectly within its rights. It's odd how many people out there actually try to attribute any kind of . . . you know, corporations are groups of individuals so it's very hard to get any kind of a moral structure from a corporation; corporations work within the law. I would hope that there wouldn't be another situation like that coming up. Not that I'm ever going to come up with something like Superman! *(Laughter.)*

BOB: *You never know. Thanks for spending this time with me —*

KEITH: I wish I had more to tell you about this. I can tell you that there probably will be an ongoing monthly comic, we're sort of putting it together right now. There's a LOBO PARAMILITARY CHRISTMAS SPECIAL coming out this year, then it's going into a regular . . . I shouldn't say a *regular* monthly book because it will be a monthly book with a little *twist*. **Dan Raspler,** the editor, came up with a nice little twist as to how to keep Lobo fresh, not tie him down. So, even if nothing happens in film or TV, the character is still healthy enough to stay in the comics, for whatever bizarre reason. *(Laughter.)*

"I was a strict Marvel guy, so I wasn't going

TIM SALE &

You can't find a bigger fan of the early CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN comic book than yours truly. I mean, Jack Kirby and Wally Wood art, fantastic stories of wild imagination . . . what young teen-age mind could resist such charms?

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VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Tim Sale
Born: 1 May 1956 — Ithaca, NY
Residence: Seattle, Washington (since 1962)
Favorite Comics: DIETER LUMPEN by Zentner & Pellejero, anything by Joe Matt or Bernie Mireault, LT. BLUEBERRY by Moebius and Charlier, BATMAN: YEAR ONE by Miller, Mazzuchelli and Lewis, BAKER STREET by Guy Davis, SPIDER-MAN #33 by Lee and Ditko, SANDMAN by Gaiman
Credits: GRENDEL, THE AMAZON, THIEVES' WORLD and upcoming: BILLI 99 from Dark Horse, LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT with James Robinson, TARZAN with Matt Wagner
Hobbies: Goofin' with KT

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to be taught by any goddamn DC artist."

JEPH LOEB

also not just another "let's tear down our boyhood heroes" pastiche, according to series scripter Jeph Loeb and artist Tim Sale, with whom I met to discuss their work on the book. Their vision for the series is visual, visceral, and very unique, borrowing from Loeb's experience in films and Sale's dislike for super-heroes but love of the comics medium. If the mini-series is as entertaining as it was speaking with these two creative types, comics fans new and old are in for a treat . . .

JEFF GELB: *How about some background on both you guys?*

TIM SALE: In 1976 I went to New York City for a year to be in the **John Buscema** workshop. I didn't know it at the time, but it really was just a poor man's version of the **Kubert** school.

JEFF: *Was this before the Kubert school?*

TIM: I don't know, but they were both going at the same time. Basically it cost less, and at that point I was a strict Marvel guy, so I wasn't going to be taught by any goddamn DC artist. Of

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Jeph Loeb (aka Joseph Loeb III)
Born: 29 January 1958 — Stamford, CT
Residence: Beverly Hills, CA
Favorite Comics: CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN, JUSTICE LEAGUE, LEGION OF SUPERHEROES, HULK
Credits: Screenwriter/producer of TEEN WOLF, COMMANDO, BURGLAR and upcoming: REID FLEMING, WORLD'S TOUGHEST MILKMAN: THE MOVIE
Words to Live by: "I make my living in movies, but I loves my comix."

Two self-portraits . . . artist Tim Sale took to using a brush for his piece while Mr. Loeb chose a less stylized method for his portrait. Both are gifted talents on or off the drawing board. Note: All the following illustrations are from the CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN mini-series consisting of preliminary sketches, pencil drawings, character designs, unpublished work and the like — enjoy!

"In CHALLENGERS, there is a sequence Tim

course, now **Kubert** is one of my absolute favorites. But it was a depressing experience for me.

JEFF: *Depressing in what way?*

TIM: Depressing because at that time in the field there was very little experimentation. HOWARD THE DUCK was about as weird as any of it got. Most of the class, because of **Buscema,** was geared around CONAN as an alternative to superhero books. I didn't have really wild, experimental ideas, but the whole thing seemed to be strictly learning rules to follow, and creativity wasn't really a part of it.

JEFF: *Did you want to draw CONAN or something really wacky when you first started?*

TIM: Superheroes or CONAN were fine with me; it wasn't, at that point, a matter of subject matter, it was whether or not you were going to feel strait-jacketed all of the time. It was like, no, you can't have Spider-Man jumping out of a window unless you establish that the window is there first. You also had to have a close-up on every page, along with an establishing shot; there were just a lot of rules that in their rigidity seemed silly, and they didn't come easily to me.

JEFF: *Looking ahead — from 1976 to 1991 — were the rules right or can you toss them out?*

TIM: You can't toss them out completely, they were just too pat. It depends on how you are telling the story. If, for example, you are doing a silent sequence, you need to be a lot more careful that you are showing everything. I'm very fond of silent sequencing. You should be able to get the bare bones of the story just by looking at the pictures. And I think Jeph will agree with me.

JEPH LOEB: In order to follow what is happening you need to not only read it but you need to read it carefully. Cases where there are long speeches, one after another, I don't mind if those speeches are intended to have you better understand the character. But when those speeches say, "Well, I just got back from the Planet X where I was fighting with Xennon, and he is going to be chasing me around the galaxy, so we better take cover" — I'd rather just have Xennon come crashing through and we'll pick it up as we go along.

JEFF: *I absolutely agree with you but I wonder if your attitude comes from your experience as a screenwriter, where you are used to telling things cinematically?*

JEPH: There's no doubt about that. In CHALLENGERS, my first comic book, there is a sequence, after a mountain blows up, that Tim and I talked about doing without any words at all. We turned in the artwork and script and our editor, **Barbara Kesel,** called and said, "One of the things you have to understand is the difference between film and comics. In film, because there's movement, there's sound, and there's music, you can skip an awful lot and get dramatic impact. In comics, you need to have something else on the page for the reader." I think there is a fine line between those two. As we went along I knew we could do it better but I didn't think that every panel, every page needed someone to say something.

JEFF: *This is interesting because it comes back to what you were talking about, the rules. I have a feeling that the reason anyone demands word balloons at all, or captions, is because then it takes you at least fifteen minutes to read a comic instead of five. What's wrong with a five-minute comics-reading experience — if you feel like you've been riding a colossus for the past five minutes?*

TIM: I'm sure that everyone's had the experience of zipping through a wordless sequence and tearing through it because you want to get on to what's happening next. A lot of people who do that will not go back through it a second time. In my breakdowns I like to fool with pacing, how quickly or how slowly to tell a story. How many panels does it take, and what size. Words can be used effectively that

Pencilled transitional panels

and I talked about doing without any words."

way, slowing down or speeding up a story. I grew up reading **Stan Lee** working with **Jack Kirby**, and **Steve Ditko**, and you would have a lot of captions that would explain what was going on, but I loved it, loved that pace.

JEPH: I remember distinctly when **Roy Thomas** started writing differently.

JEFF: *I think one of the reasons why true adults, and I'm forty, don't read comics is because they can't get used to the style in which you are told to write. They really don't know why there have to be words in every panel. I think that in comics people sometimes create rules that don't have to be followed. They're just worried about what might happen if you break the barrier.*

TIM: This was definitely true in the **Buscema** school, these were hard and fast people working with a bunch of eighteen-, nineteen-, twenty-year-olds. "Don't give me cross hatching." These are the rules you have to follow, this is it.

JEFF: *And no wonder you were depressed.*

JEPH: My experience is from the outside world looking in — so when I did this book there were a number of people in the motion picture business, who are my friends, to whom I sent copies of CHALLENGERS. Largely to say that this is something else that I write and I want you to have. To a person, every one of them looked through it and said that "this doesn't look like anything I remember." What I mean is that, when we think back, there was always a strict four- or six-panel page, when **Kirby's** work really dominated the field and that's what people remember. When there are border-less panels; when there are pages that have a little bit of color and the rest of it is white; wordless pages; all of that stuff — for those of us in the industry, I don't think we are doing anything that is ground breaking, but to adults who don't read comics, we are. Comics have changed completely. When I show my screenwriting partner, who I work with every day, things like prestige format, hardcover books, he's astonished, he can't even believe that such a thing exists. When he looks at the color and the

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"My first professional work was inking Phil Foglio."

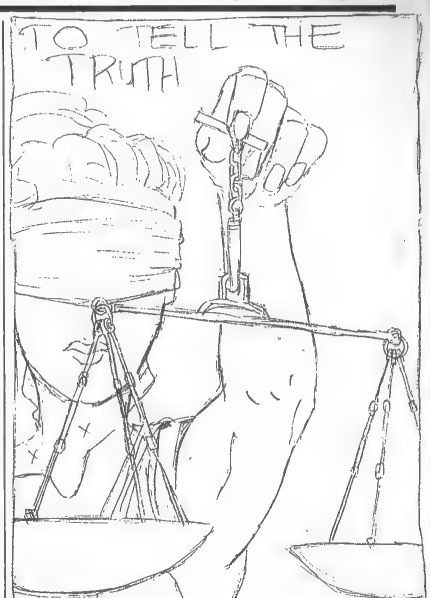
quality of the paper, it's surprising to him. Now how DC and Marvel can reach that audience, or if they wanted to, is another whole question. I think DARK KNIGHT did it.

JEFF: *I guess what you're saying is that none of the rules DC put on you were things that you ended up feeling were detrimental to the final product?*

JEPH: Right . . . from a creative point of view. The exception being the opening process of getting them to say OK, we'll do this — going through the treatment again, again, and again before writing anything. Once those things were cleared out then **Barbara Kesel,** and **Elliot Maggin,** and **Katie Main** — our three editors on the book — set to work. Their jobs were basically keeping Tim and I honest, meaning keeping the story within where it was going and making sure that as you read the page you understood what was being said. There was never a sense of "you have to do it this way." There were comments like, "This sentence doesn't make sense," or "This dialogue doesn't make sense." And as time went by I found myself overcompensating, putting in "meanwhile," and "later," and "soon" boxes. And **Elliot Maggin** would go through and take that stuff out. With Tim's work you understand where you are, although as you know from reading it we jumped around a lot, at times it takes the reader a page to catch up on what is going on. I think **Frank Miller** broke the mold, I think he said you don't have to tell a story in chronological order, you don't have to tell a story from one person's point of view.

JEFF: *Getting back to you, Tim — what happened after the Buscema school?*

TIM: I came back not interested in doing comics. At the time, **Barry Windsor-Smith** was getting into producing posters and getting out of comics. I was into CONAN and the other fantasy stuff. After a while I started doing Christmas cards and other fantasy cards, lots of noodly lines, just like **Smith.** I had them printed, my sister Maggie sold them and we were going to fantasy conventions and. selling my work there. At NorWesCon I met **Jane Fancher,** who was helping **Wendy Pini,** with the inks on ELFQUEST. She wasn't that experienced yet and she liked my stuff and especially my black-and-white work, where I like to use a lot of black. What she was told, in one of those Rules, was that the inker's job was to "spot" blacks, which I never understood. If it's not there in the pencils I suppose you can go in and black things out if you want. At any rate, since she saw a lot of black in my stuff, she said, "Oh, you'd be a great inker." I saw that as a way to not have to deal with rules but still work in the comic-book industry. My first professional work was in 1984 inking **Phil Foglio** on MYTH ADVENTURES, my WaRP Graphics/ **Wendy Pini** connection helping out. The creators and editors of THIEVES' WORLD, a husband-and-wife team, were **Robert Asprin** and **Lynn Abbey.** Bob was the writer of the MYTH ADVENTURE series. They saw my work, liked it, and knew they could get me cheap. And so I did that and moved to Ann Arbor. After THIEVES' WORLD ran its course I hooked up with an agent, **Mike Friedrich,** who has also been in the business for years and has been a great help to me. I went to the San Diego convention where I met **Matt Wagner,** which is how I got the GRENDEL job. Just before GRENDEL I did



#2's unused splash preliminary

"The show was TWILIGHT ZONE with tits."

THE AMAZON, written by **Steve Seagle**, for Comico. It didn't make any money, it didn't sell many issues, but more than anything else, so far, it has made publishers, writers, editors, artists look at my work.

JEPH: Even **Frank Miller** called you.

TIM: *(Laughter.)* Yes, even **Frank Miller** called me. I also just finished inking over **Norm Breyfogle** on BATMAN #460. I have never done superheroes before CHALLENGERS even though I grew up with them. And CHALLENGERS are only *sort of* superheroes.

JEFF: *At this point, how do you feel about inking over other people? Is it bad or is it fun?*

TIM: It's both, really. My main concern is what will they think. I tried to go out of my way by calling the editor and Norm and asking what they had in mind. Everybody told me to do what I want to do. So I did. And it looks very different from most of Norm's stuff.

JEFF: *Do you have any idea what Norm thought of it?*

TIM: I know that Norm had a tough time for three or four days, but he waited three or four days before he called me and he told me he liked it a lot.

JEFF: *Has anyone ever inked your work?*

TIM: Yes, once, and it was a terrible experience. I did a back-up story in TOTAL ECLIPSE, AZTEC ACE. I didn't have a lot of fun with the pencils and the inks were, well, I know that people weren't especially happy with the pencils and so they got someone to try to do something more to their liking. I would be surprised if they ended up thinking it was better after it was inked.

JEFF: *Jeph, we know you have film credentials. How did that begin and then how did the comics job come through?*

JEPH: I went to film school at Columbia University in 1979-80. The second part of the year I met my partner, **Matthew Weisman.** Much like Tim, it was one of those things, we could finish each other's sentences. We found the same things funny, and we like the same kind of movies. We graduated in June, 1980, and in August moved out here knowing no one in the business and starved for three years. We tended bars, made sandwiches, but to everyone we met, we were writers and producers, that's what we were going to do. Finally, I decided that we needed to get into the industry, so I took a job as secretary/assistant for **Riff Markowitz** and **Lewis Chesler.** At the time they were producing things like CRYSTAL GAYLE specials for HBO, which was just perfect — we're talking 1982, '83. Now everyone thinks of HBO as this major conglomerate; at the time, there was almost no original programming and Lewis had a breakthrough idea which was to do a dramatic half-hour series. They bought the rights to EC's TALES FROM THE CRYPT. At the time they didn't want to do TALES, but rather modernize the stories and make them hipper. And so, Matthew and I and **Richard Rothstein** did essentially the three pilots for the show THE HITCH-HIKER. Not many people know, but those shows were based on stories that were in TALES FROM THE CRYPT.

JEFF: *Whose idea was it to option TALES FROM THE CRYPT, was it a comics fan?*

JEPH: No, not at all, it was just someone who simply recognized a vast library of material. In fact, it was Lewis who could see that these stories could be very serial. At the time, the major difference between cable and network was tits — the show that we were selling was TWILIGHT ZONE with tits. We wound up going to Canada where the shows were produced. And then my partner and I went on to produce 45 half-hour episodes of a TV show that's never seen the light of day.

JEFF: *How is that possible?*

JEPH: Well, because it got caught up in a lawsuit between PLAYBOY and the Canadian Network it was supposed to air on. The show was basically a naughty 9-TO-5.

JEFF: *Let me go back to the HITCH-*

Pencil panel

"For us, the motion picture business is taking off."

HIKER series. Are you saying you co-wrote the original?

JEPH: Yes. However, because of some complications in Canada, **Lewis Benson** is the person who gets credit on those shows.

JEFF: *How long did you stay on the HITCHHIKER?*

JEPH: We were on the show for the first thirteen episodes and wrote one episode called "Love Sounds," which we do have credit on.

JEFF: *How many were based on old ECs?*

JEPH: I think just the first three. We talked about writing our own episodes; after all, why continue to pay **Bill Gaines** however much he was getting, if we could just make up the show given the fact that we no longer needed the Crypt-Keeper? The HITCHHIKER is now an entity unto itself — there are now 85 of these episodes. They are now on USA and not HBO.

While working on the series we were talking about our future career and things happened from the connections we made in Canada. We started to talk to **Jonathan Dana** who, at the time, was president of a company called Atlantic. We pitched a low-budget movie called TEEN WOLF and they said if we could get **Michael J. Fox** they would make the movie.

In hindsight it sounds like a brilliant idea. At the time Michael was in a show (FAMILY TIES) that everyone confused with SILVER SPOONS; Michael was not at that time a household name. So we started shooting the movie, and weird things were happening — Michael was becoming a star while we were making the movie. Every day we were on the set you could tell he was making news, people found out where we were shooting — a lot of things were going on. It was a very exciting experience.

At the same time, just before the TEEN WOLF job, everyone was asking us, is there anything we have that they can read? We kept saying "No, just give us a chance and we'll do it." Finally we sat down and wrote COMMANDO on spec, not expecting anyone to buy it and sure enough, it sold!

Suddenly, in 1985, we had two movies in the top ten, COMMANDO with **Schwarzenegger** was number one, and TEEN WOLF was number seven. Suddenly, we were in the movie business!

We then did BURGLAR with **Whoopi Goldberg** and the sequels to TEEN WOLF and COMMANDO. The COMMANDO sequel, of course, never happened. Since then we have spent a lot of time working for Disney. We worked on THREE MEN AND A LITTLE LADY, and did a **Schwarzenegger** comedy called ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN, which **Michael Douglas** is producing.

For us, the motion picture business is taking off. We have projects like REID FLEMING, WORLD'S TOUGHEST MILKMAN, which **David Boswell** (who writes, creates, and draws the comic book) has written the script for.

JEFF: *How does a guy who has a lot of work to do find the time and inclination to do all the work it takes to do a comic series?*

JEPH: Tim would argue that . . . I don't. *(Laughter.)*

TIM: One of the reasons that the project is three years old is the knowledge of Jeph's other job. We didn't want to start to come out with the series before it was essentially done, all issues.

JEPH: I don't think that's fair. I believe that we could have met any deadline. DC did not give us a deadline and we were not on the schedule until November of 1990.

TIM: They didn't give us a deadline, not because we're wonderful people, but because they realize that you and I work in a unique way together.

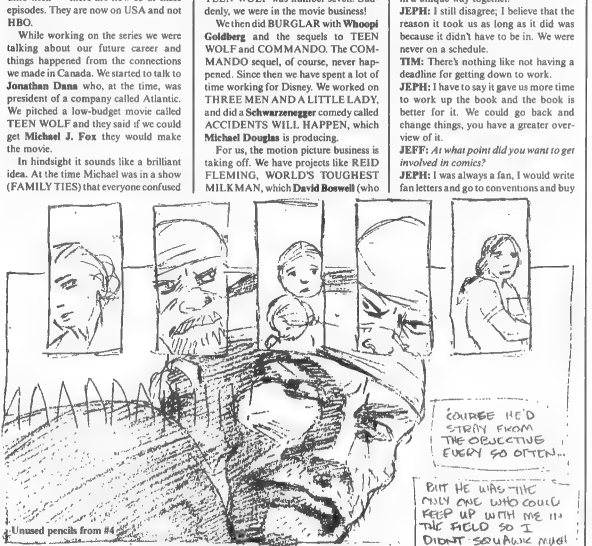
JEPH: I still disagree; I believe that the reason it took us as long as it did was because it didn't have to be in. We were never on a schedule.

TIM: There's nothing like not having a deadline for getting down to work.

JEPH: I have to say it gave us more time to work up the book and the book is better for it. We could go back and change things, you have a greater overview of it.

JEFF: *At what point did you want to get involved in comics?*

JEPH: I was always a fan, I would write fan letters and go to conventions and buy


COURSE HE'D STRAY FROM THE OBJECTIVE EVERY SO OFTEN..
BUT HE WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO COULD KEEP UP WITH ME IN THE FIELD SO I DIDN'T SQUAWK MUCH

Unused pencils from #4

"We got CHALLENGERS but didn't know anything

artwork.

TIM: And you have two No-Prizes!

JEPH: I do. Two!

JEFF: *Another Marvel Zombie heard from.*

JEPH: Yes, I almost exclusively read Marvel until the late '70s. Although I was aware of the **Neal Adams** DC issues and I knew Elliot, so I always bought Elliot's books. Some of the LEGION OF SUPERHEROES books were interesting. Then I started buying everything.

Getting back to when I was talking about COMMANDO and TEEN WOLF, one of the things that happens is that a lot of the people in the business want to talk to you. Some of the people that were interested in being in business with us were the people producing the BATMAN movie. **Stan Brooks**, then at Guber-Peters, was trying to get **Jenette Kahn** to explore DC characters for a TV series with him. We talked about doing a FLASH TV series years before the current one. We actually went to NBC and had sold the show in 1987. We couldn't make the deal. Stan took us to **Peter Guber** (his boss) and said "Let's do it as a feature." We met with Peter, who could see the movie dead on, knew exactly how he wanted it, and the guy we talked about to play the Flash was **Michael Keaton.** Again, the deal fell apart and, instead, we chose to do another movie with them, THE NIGHTTIME GUY — which is still in development at Warner Bros.

Anyway, out of all that grew this friendship with **Jenette Kahn.** And one day, Jenette said, "If you're not going to do the movie or the series, would you like to do a comic for us?" The words weren't even out of her mouth when I said, "Yes, please." She said, "Well, I'll put you in touch with **Dick Giordano** who" to me is the guy that inked all of **Neal Adams'** greatest stuff and knew Neal. It was like, I'm actually going to meet **Dick Giordano!** So all of a sudden the fanboy came out in me. Dick sent me, which I understand they don't do anymore, a list of titles that were available. I looked at the list and came up with a proposal for THE CREEPER and they told me, the book is no longer available; so I said, OK, THE ATOM, and they said, not available.

We finally got the CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN, but didn't know anything about them, except that they didn't have super powers and went around in purple pajamas. I went to a comic store and asked for CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN and I pictured a box with pristine bags, all numbered, that were priced $3, $5 and $10. Instead he brought out a box with a stack of comics, they're not even bagged, and said to me, "Here are all the CHALLENGERS that we have," and I'm thinking to myself, this has got to be $500. He says $50 for the entire run of

except they didn't have powers and wore purple pajamas."

CHALLENGERS and I thought that was kind of sad, so much of it was **Kirby's** artwork.

TIM: The first nine issues were **Kirby** and then **Bob Brown.** Then **Adams** got involved and towards the end SWAMP THING and DEADMAN were regular characters in the book. **Mike Nasser** took over the book, sort of aping **Adams'** style, and then it ended.

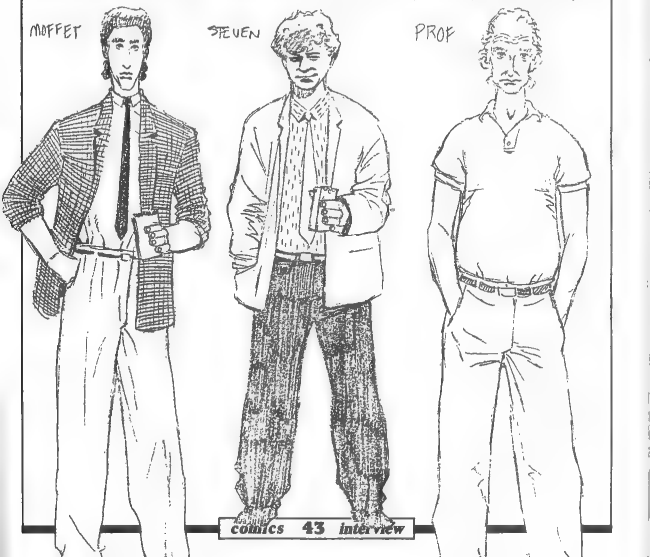
JEPH: And that was the most bizarre part about it. That sometime in April of 1977 they ceased to exist. There were a couple of times they would pop up, but if you think about the number of reissues and guest stars and all that stuff DC published, for 13 or 14 years, there was nothing! And I'm sure someone will write in and say no, they appeared in . . . and I know that **Mark Evanier** worked very hard at trying to revive it.

Anyway, when Jenette first said, "Do you want to do a comic," I had an idea that the Bat Cave blew up and killed half the people in Gotham City and that Batman became an outlaw and then he had to make it right again. Well, that wasn't going to happen, at least not in my lifetime. I thought the Challenger Mountain was one of the dumbest ideas in the world, and that it was essentially the Baxter Building, in a mountain, and so I thought, well, let's just blow that right out on the first issue. Let's just blow it up and kill half the people that live around there and then let's see what happens.

Everyone then said, "OK, so all these people get killed and they have to vindicate themselves," and I said, "No, that's not what happens — they quit." And they go off and lead their own lives and then they are drawn back together again. When there is a great tragedy people get numb and want to get away and so that's how it begins. And that's the first step that I think broke the CHALLENGER mold, so to speak. And that was when I decided that these guys can be 40 or 50 years old and that they had put on a little weight and — since no one had heard from them in thirteen years — why not use that rather than ignore it? I didn't like the idea that they were perpetually 29 and they look like Bruce Wayne.

JEFF: *Some of that starts out like WATCHMEN, too, but the book doesn't feel like that at all.*

JEPH: No, I didn't get that, either, but I know that when I was first telling people about the book, about what we were doing, that these guys were 40 years old and fat and they were like, "Oh, WATCHMEN." You have to remember that this proposal predated WATCHMEN and there are a number of things that you say, "Wow, this is sort of like . . ." but it wasn't at the time. I think that what we do to make this interesting is inherent in the fact that they are older. We also play with layout and structure of the stories; there are a lot of in-jokes,



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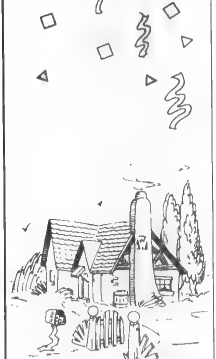

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"As a parent, I believe comics have a responsibility."

Jeph Loeb (L) and Tim Sale (R) during a convention on January 26 of this year.

comic-book references.

JEFF: *I wanted to mention that — I'm not sure how many I have spotted but I have a small list. I may have stopped looking after awhile, but I noticed Rick Jones, THE DAILY BUGLE, J. Jonah Jameson, Peter Parker . . .*

JEPH: Some of that stuff, you may be looking at things that haven't been corrected . . .

JEFF: *Why bother correcting it — is there a problem there?*

JEPH: There were a lot more.

JEFF: *I think that stuff is tremendously fun. I don't see a reason in the world why anybody at Marvel or anyplace else would come over to you and say, "Hey guys, don't do this."*

JEPH: They sue all the time. That's the problem, it's a legal problem; they sue all the time.

JEFF: *Does that mean that he will no longer be able to rent his room from Doctor Strange?*

JEPH: *(Laughter.)* That's something that you saw that's not necessarily so.

JEPH: For Fleming we had to get permission and we did.

TIM: There were some things we had to get written permission for. For instance, I drew Jeph, and we did not say it was **Jeph Loeb,** but we had to get permission.

JEFF: *I wouldn't have known that before today.*

TIM: And that's why it's amazing that we had to get permission. **Matt Wagner,** who drew GRENDEL, is a friend of mine. He is also in one of the court-room scenes; I had to get his written permission.

JEFF: *I also noticed film references and I'm sure I missed a lot of them. CLOSE ENCOUNTERS, CITIZEN KANE. Any references that I missed?*

JEPH: There are things that no one would get, for example there is a line in ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN where **Redford** is confronting **Hal Holbrook** over who is really responsible for what is going on and **Holbrook** says, essentially, "They bugged, they broke into places, they smeared campaigns, they wanted to run against **McCarthy** and look who they're running against. And don't tell me that you think this was all the plan of little **Donald Sagretti."** Again, one of the lines that is in there is "Don't tell me that you think this is all the plan of little Duncan Pramble?"

JEFF: *That stuff is a lot of fun to me. I think people look for stuff like that when they read comics, and I hope that you don't have to take all of it out, let's put it that way.*

JEPH: Oh, no, a lot of that stuff is not a problem. The film references are no problem and a lot of the in-house DC stuff is no problem. The ones that we really ran into the biggest problems on were clearly Marvel things. Which is why we had to make little subtle changes. For example, there will be characters that will look like Marvel characters but they will be black or they will be white or they will have a beard or something like that.

JEFF: *I think that's great, it's nice to suggest that it's one big world out there. I read, through a friend of mine, an earlier version of the first issue of CHALLENGERS that had a lot of profanity in it. Which was a lot of fun. What happened?*

JEPH: I will give the READER'S DIGEST version of it since it was a much longer process. One of the things that we talked about in the beginning was that this was going to be a mature label book. They were forty- to fifty-year-old men, Rocky was an alcoholic, Ryan had homicidal tendencies — homicidal, not homosexual — and Kyle was going to be talking about metaphysical and theological types of thinking. That lent itself to me using the word "shit" instead of the word "jerk." We got approval from Barbara to do that and off we went. In the second issue we have a super guest (Superman) and it was important to include him. Between the time that we wrote the stuff and present day, DC took on a new policy. And that new policy was that Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman were not to appear in mature label books. We have to remember, folks, if you think about Disney and you think about Mickey Mouse you don't want Mickey Mouse, who sells everything from peanut butter to little plastic dolls, to be in a book where there are naked breasts and people saying "shit." I couldn't argue with that no matter what I tried to do and so DC gave us a choice, very simple: we could pull Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman out of the book, go a different direction, and we could maintain the language and the nudity. Or, we could clean up the book. We chose to clean up the book. I do not feel in any way that this is a censorship issue. It's almost not even worth discussing because I completely understood and supported it from the beginning. As a parent, I believe that comics have a responsibility that if you're going to put in frank nudity and frank language, you put a label on it, and it is the stores' responsibility not to sell that book to a minor.

JEFF: *There is no doubt that in the past five years most of the characters which*

"As far as I'm concerned, four guys got on a plane, the

have been re-introduced, especially in mini-series, have had revisions in histories or been taken to levels where certain readers find it sacrilegious. I'm thinking of THE SHADOW, BLACKHAWK, and the upcoming TWILIGHT series. Also ADAM STRANGE comes to mind. As a fan, do you ever feel that is an unfair route to go? And as a professional writer, why choose to do it that way, as opposed to telling the best possible CHALLENGERS story?

JEPH: First of all, to settle the controversy which has already started — I read about it in the fan press — I never said that the original Challenger stories never happened. It may be what you gleaned from the first issue, but that's not the whole story. It's just that's the way they were reported, by people like **Kirby** and **Adams** and Moffet. They may have changed what actually happened. I do believe in the tradition of THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALENCE, that when the legend becomes fact you print the legend. The people who now retell those stories, myself included, may have changed what really happened.

You have to decide what is legend and what is fact.

If you are to believe that these guys really exist in the world that they exist, then in the second issue — which is largely the retelling of the origin — you have to decide from the two stories that are told, which is truth and which is legend. I think the way Tim drew it, and the characters themselves, lead you to believe that it's not entirely true, that's not how it happened — so you then have to decide. It's not as though I did what **John Byrne** did, which was to say, there is no Superboy, Superman first appeared in Metropolis and then went on from that point.

As far as I'm concerned, four guys got on a plane, the plane crashed, they got out and then tried to solve these things. The fact that they then merchandised themselves, turned Challenger Mountain into a museum and a theme park and so on were things that I brought to it — because I wanted to explain how these guys were making a living. I didn't think these guys went off and got jobs in a mall. That was one of the sad things about WATCHMEN; all of the characters had turned away from their superhero identity.

If you were the biggest superhero of the '60s and you no longer served a function in the '90s, why not merchandise yourself? Why not have television shows and hit movies and lunchboxes and all that stuff? And then sit in the mountain and wait for something to happen in your life. Some of the characters were happy with that and some of them were extremely unhappy.

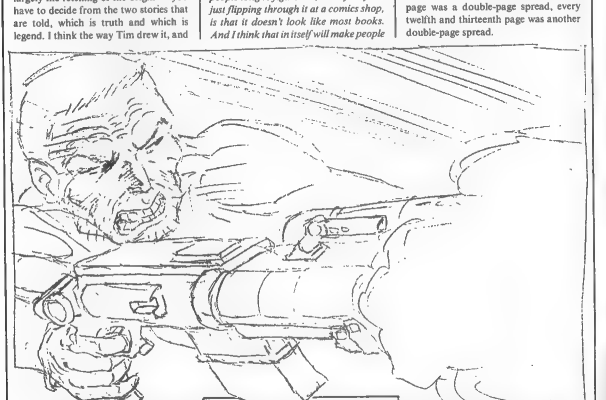
JEFF: *One of the things it won't take people long to figure out, even if they are just flipping through it at a comics shop, is that it doesn't look like most books. And I think that in itself will make people buy at least one issue. And I think that is a tribute to your work. People will say, "Why would a guy break a page down in this way?" Stylistically the book exists in its own world. I don't know another book that looks quite like it. Who made those choices?*

TIM: We did. The way Jeph and I work is very different from what I have experienced before. Jeph, most of the time, has an idea as far as what he wants the page to look like. He has, I think, a remarkable feel for comics for somebody that had never written them before. I think that most people who are successful in another medium and come to comics don't make the transition very well.

JEFF: *Is the story done in full script?*

TIM: No, well, yes — it's a full script on the phone. The conversation ends with a full script. Jeph describes a page to me and . . .

JEPH: . . . I take a credit card and draw twenty-four boxes, one for each page. Tim and I sit on the phone and say, "OK, what is going to be on each page?" It's very much like building a film script – you know that certain scenes have to come at certain points and so there were certain images that we would discuss ahead of time. For example, for every first page we would begin with a close-up of someone's face, every second and third page was a double-page spread, every twelfth and thirteenth page was another double-page spread.



plane crashed, they got out, and tried to solve things."

TIM: Since we both have an affection for people like **Steranko**, who really fuck with the page, those were the kind of ideas we would get.

JEPH: A good example was the first issue. We knew that the mountain had to blow up and we wanted it to be spectacular. Between our two conversations we somehow managed to get the configuration on pages twelve and thirteen — which was Moffet looking out the window and then the mountain blowing across the page. I asked Tim, what can we do, and he said we could break the page to have it look like shattered glass. We then turned the page, and I had this idea of an hourglass, and that the pieces would start to run down through an hourglass. Tim said, "OK, hourglass, got it."

Later, when he said to me, "I didn't do the hourglass," I said, "No, that's important, the hourglass is really important." And then, when I opened the page and saw what he had done with the swirling pieces I thought, "Wow! He made it *better!*" On the other hand, there is a page where Moffet is asleep and the television is on and it starts changing channels, we get little pieces of news and static . . .

TIM: I redrew it five or six times.

JEPH: . . . I kept saying, "This isn't it, it's not what I have in my head. It's not working for me."

TIM: He usually begins with "I love what you did."

JEPH: Well, of course, we redrew the plane crash in the second issue because of the wreckage.

TIM: I had it as a big fireball up through the trees.

JEFF: *Not everyone who is a comics writer thinks as visually as you do. I think the collaboration of the two of you presents a very visual book. Let's talk about the editors. So far, you've had three on the book. Why did you have three editors and did it hinder you in any way?*

JEPH: I think it hurt the book in that it took longer to get the book published. That is the single most important aspect as to why the book didn't get published sooner. I think in terms of getting the book off the ground, **Barbara Kesel** was the best. Barbara had a vision as to where it was going to go and kept a very close rein on me, in particular, in terms of the storytelling. That helped me enormously in understanding the artform because I had never worked in it before.

Barbara left when we were on the second issue. When Barbara left, she left DC, it wasn't like she left the book. I told her she couldn't do this to me, because I was going to get a real hard ass person on me who was going to say, "Rules are rules." I know only one person, one person in comics who worked professionally, out of what — hundreds, thousands of people? Barbara said her replacement was **Elliot Maggin**, and I said, "This is a joke — you're kidding — Elliot is a friend, I've known him since I was a kid.

Elliot's style was very much hands off. As long as we were going in the right direction it was cool with him. He gave us a lot of latitude, maybe too much, because there were things that we got into like the problem with the nudity and language that maybe a different editor would have been more sensitive to earlier on. It was Elliot who started the process of getting a different cover artist for every issue. Elliot then left, he decided to move to California and pursue his screenwriting career — which is another interesting turn of events.

And then Katie came on as editor and inherited a book which was practically finished. What Katie got instead was "Jeph, you've used **Sinatra's** lyrics in book five, I've got to clear that for God's sake, you can't just write that stuff in." And then some other things started to happen. The joke has been that we now have a regular editor, one who is going to stay on the book — we all have to get to work — right, Katie? If the book gets picked up she has agreed to stay with the book.

JEFF: *Do you want to do other comic-book work or do you just want to stay with the CHALLENGERS?*

JEPH: At this moment the only person I am interested in working with is Tim.

TIM: My take on that is that I enjoy working with Jeph because he has weird ideas.

JEPH: Like with my partner **Matt Weisman**, who I've been with for ten years, it's a good marriage with Tim.

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

PISSED OFF

Dear DAK:

A few issues ago you asked in a survey what would make us subscribe to CI. Eliminating boring interviews like the **Dave Stevens** one is a start in the right direction. Never was I so bored in my life! Usually when an interview is boring at least there's great art showcased, which helps to take attention away from the lame interview. Not this time. And besides that, Dave pissed me off regarding his comments about the flying effects in SUPERMAN: THE MOVIE. If he thinks the flying effects in THE ROCKETEER are better, he's sadly mistaken. They're about the same. After watching a sneak preview of the film I could tell which scenes were done using blue screen, wires, helicopters, and models. Idiot!

Delmo (The Saint) Walters Jr.
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Bronx, NY 10457

AN OPEN LETTER (COMMENTS INVITED)

To the Comics Industry:

Promotion: **Dave Kraft** calls it "that thing that nobody in comics does." In a very large sense, he is right.

Oh, sure, all the major publishers have promotion departments, who send out press releases and prepare ads for forthcoming comics. But who does all this

[illegible] (100% COMMENTS)

[illegible] such passing issue, the excite- [illegible] grows — COMICS INTERVIEW [illegible] is coming!

Naturally, that puts your editor, [illegible] in a contemplative state of [illegible], looking back on past issues of COMICS INTERVIEW and ahead to [illegible] future of the magazine. You've helped [illegible] us one of the handful of comics [illegible] publications that really count, and now [illegible] asking each and every one who [illegible] and appreciates INTERVIEW for [illegible] feedback. Here's your chance to be [illegible] — loud and clear!

[illegible] need not mutilate this magazine. [illegible] sheet of paper will give you

[illegible] more space to answer, [illegible] address and receive acknowledgement in print and a free copy of a hand-colored guide used to produce our covers (we will attempt to accommodate all requests for specific covers whenever possible — but first come, first served).

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LAST WORD

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"promotion" go to? The direct sales market — the one area guaranteed to be receptive to anything comics publishers do, within reason.

Yet the direct sales market is a limited one. Why did Marvel produce four or five different versions of X-MEN #1? Because it was the only way to increase sales of the book within the direct sales market . . . where, increasingly, the name of the game is market share . . . because the market is probably extremely mature and unlikely to grow greatly in the future.

So how can comics publishers grow, as all companies must if they are to continue to succeed? By finding new audiences, in traditional bookstores and elsewhere. But you can't attract a bookstore browser with the same cover elements and product packaging that lures the typical comics fan in his local direct sales outlet.

The first step is not to make them *look* like comics — use more full-painted art, make the covers look like standard paperback cover design. There are even little marketing tricks you can use to "fool" the bookstore managers: Note that many paperback publishers put little genre reminders on the spine: near the colophon — "science fiction," "fantasy," "romance." No reason comics publishers can't do the same . . . don't label them as comics, label them as SF, romance, western, or whatever. The harried store staff will put them where *you* want them to be, not where they *think* they should go if they have to look inside to determine content. That would keep titles like LOVE AND ROCKETS out of the SF section and THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS out of the humor section — where so many bookstores seem to throw anything that looks like comics.

The second step is advertising. The major companies all run ads in CBG; some also occasionally hit COMICS INTERVIEW or COMICS SCENE. Why aren't they advertising there more often? They claim it's preaching to the converted . . . and to some extent they're right. On the other hand, if you ask them why SF-oriented titles aren't advertised in STARLOG or ANALOG, the answer is, "The people who read those magazines don't buy comics." Damned if you do, damned if you don't.

Why aren't Marvel and DC and Eclipse and Dark Horse and all the others doing this? Because the promotion departments at all the publishers never stray outside their little ghetto in the direct sales market . . . and wouldn't know how to if they tried.

Patrick Daniel O'Neill
Staten Island, NY

INTERVIEW: MORE THAN MONEY'S WORTH

Dear DAK —

I would like to take this opportunity to renew my subscription to COMICS INTERVIEW for one year, starting with issue #99. As a side note, I would like to say how much I have enjoyed this magazine. As a regular reader since the first issue and a subscriber for the last three years, I feel that I have gotten more than my money's worth each and every issue.

Also, I would like to order #2 as a back issue. Enclosed is a letter I received when I first back-ordered this issue and it was not in stock, to be used as a credit. I would like issue #2 now that it's back in stock.

Again, thank you very much.

Chuck Robinson
660 Bear Lake Road
North Muskegon, MI 49445

Thank you, Chuck, for recognizing quality when you see it — and for staying with for us going on 100 issues now!

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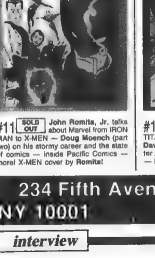

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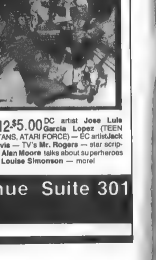

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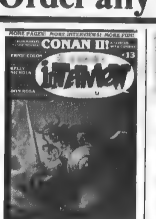

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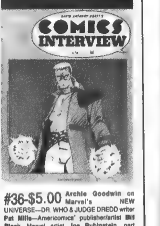

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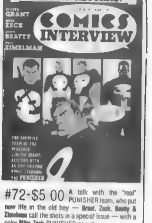

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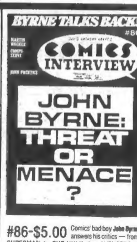

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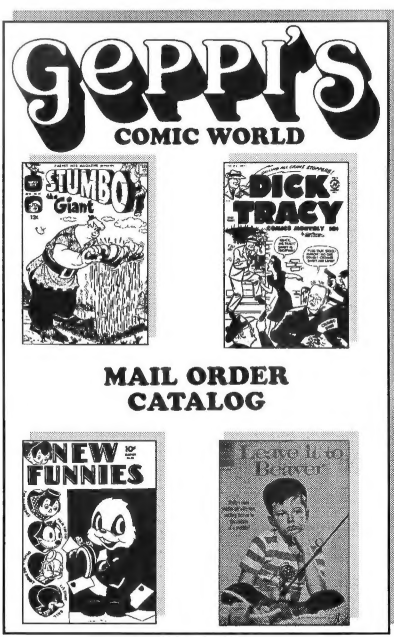

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This isn't a popularity contest or another listing of fan favorites here. Let's face it, to make it to the top you sometimes have to step on a few toes. What put these people on our list is power. The power to make things happen — or to pull the plug.

But it takes more than merely occupying an influential position. We looked for people who don't just have potential power, but who currently *exercise* that influence in comics. Some still hold considerable sway, but are content to exercise it sporadically or ineffectively, if at all.

That's why we left some very nice people off the list, Stan Lee among them.

And there are a few people here who have a lot more respect than they do friends. These people have the power. And, for better or for worse, they're not afraid to use it.

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